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Translation, Interpretation, and Common Meaning: Victoria Welby's Significal Perspective
Traduction, interprétation et signifié commun : la signifique chez Victoria Welby

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Résumé de l'article

Au XIX^{e} siècle, Victoria Welby élabore une remarquable théorie de la traduction et propose pour cette nouvelle conception du signe et du sens le terme signifique. D'une part, cette théorie de la traduction explore le vaste monde du signe de même que la nature insondable des processus de traduction et d'interprétation qui, bien évidemment, ne peuvent se résumer à une simple transposition d'une langue à une autre. En effet, la traduction interlangue s'inscrit dans un contexte où les circonstances actuelles font en sorte que le cours de la vie et les processus de traductions convergent, nous propulsant au-delà de ce qui pourrait sembler être une dimension cosmique sans frontière. D'autre part, en établissant un rapport entre sa théorie de la traduction et sa théorie du signe et du sens, Welby laisse entendre que sa théorie de la traduction est aussi créée à partir d'une théorie des valeurs, reconnaissant l'importance de cette dernière en traduisant, au sein d'un univers plurilingue et interculturel, autant dans une même langue que dans des langues différentes. Dans un monde qui est propre à l'être humain, traduire, c'est interpréter, c'est-à-dire transfigurer et transvaluer la signifiance.

Translation, Interpretation, and Common Meaning: Victoria Welby's Significal Perspective[1]

Susan Petrilli

> I myself have certainly profited most by and learnt most from thinkers with whom I do not naturally agree on the ordinary basis. Starting as it were higher up the stream of human experience I find I can translate my opponent; I see the why of him and in a dialect of thought different from his, find his mind too in mine. But then to me 'nothing human is alien.' Why should it be to any of us?…
>
> – From a letter by Welby to Bertrand Russell, 12 February 1905

1. Translation as Method

Translation is not only a practice, but also a method of interpretation and understanding, of investigation and discovery, of verification and acquisition of new knowledge, and as such is also a method of critique. Moreover, translation theory can also be a theory that reflects on sign and meaning. Such an approach can contribute to a better understanding of the practice of translation. These

1 The original nucleus of this essay is my paper 'Sign, interpretation, and translation in Victoria Welby,' delivered at the International Colloquium, *Comunicazione, Interpretazione, Traduzione* (University of Bari, Italy), published in the relative proceedings (Milan, Mimesis, 2006), and here developed and reworked.

are constitutive aspects of the thought and research of Victoria Lady Welby (1837-1912), English significian and philosopher of language.[2]

In her monograph *What is Meaning* (1903), Welby presents her theory of meaning, that she calls 'significs,' as a 'philosophy of significance,' 'philosophy of translation' and 'philosophy of interpretation,' with expressions that emphasize three distinct but interrelated dimensions of 'significating' processes (1983 [1903], p. 161). Welby broke new ground as she conducted the sense of 'translation' into the territory of reflection on sign and meaning, proposing a theory of translation understood as a cognitive-interpretive method involving all signifying processes. We know that she began focusing on the relation between signifying and interpreting practices in her early book of 1881, *Links and Clues*, where she identified four principles of interpretation addressed to: 1) the problem of literal meaning; 2) the risk of leveling sense; 3) the importance of context; and 4) the problem of dialectics as a condition for unity. She also recognized the essential role of contradiction and complementarity among the different levels of sense in the configuration of a thought system (1881, pp. 31-36).

Translation is described by Welby as 'inter-translation,' a method of interpretation and understanding and is related to reflection on signs and meaning (1983 [1903], p. 120). And given that translative processes are structural to sign processes as they develop across systemic and typological boundaries, the question of translation from a significal perspective is no less than structural to the theory of meaning. Consequently, Welby also identified a close interrelation between theory of translation and figurative language, underlining the importance of analogy in the very constitution of thought and communication processes.

2 See biographical bibliographical note on Welby at the end of this essay, section 7. Victoria Welby's footnotes to her own texts as they are here reported will be placed in brackets. In the body of this essay I have cited passages mainly from Welby's monograph of 1903, *What is Meaning?*, to illustrate aspects of her translation theory as formulated in that book. At the end of this essay are appended her thus far unpublished papers on translation retrieved from the Welby Collection, York University Archives in Toronto, Canada.

Mental activities are automatic translative processes, asserted Welby in accord with Peirce. And, in fact, Welby launched the idea of a new application of analogy which may be called in an extended sense translation. Developing Welby with Peirce we can state that all signs and expressions are translations in themselves before being subject to new translative/interpretive processes (see Petrilli and Ponzio, 2005, Part I, ch. 1 and 2).

Significs is a method for the enhancement of meaning and awareness, of significance through translative processes which are a condition for understanding and interpretation, for signifying behaviour generally (Petrilli, 2003b). Significs contributes to evidencing the relation between significance, interpretation, translation, therefore between translation and the ethical dimension of signifying processes in the human world as significance is enhanced. Without neglecting to take into account so-called 'interlingual' translation, with the term 'translation' Welby also included what may be designated a posteriori in Roman Jakobson's terminology as the processes of 'intersemiotic' and 'intralingual' translation (Jakobson, 1959). Welby's unpublished papers stored in the Welby Collection, York University Archives includes a file dedicated to the question of translation, 'i.e., definition' as recites the title of the file 'Significs—Translation (i.e. Definition),' now appended to the present article. Translation in Welby only corresponds in part to what Jakobson understands by 'intralingual' translation or 'reformulation,' as he also says. With reference to Jakobson's schemem so-called 'intralingual' translation or 'reformulation' by no means exhausts Welby's conception of translation, but only responds to an aspect of what we may describe as her very broad, significal and biosemiosic approach to translation theory and practice (see Welby, 1983 [1903], pp. 121-129).

In a letter of 1908-1911 to her daughter Nina Cust, she wrote: 'One side of my work (…) is to bring out the secret of a transfiguring translation. We speak lightly of analogy as casual, and no wonder; for few indeed of our images, metaphors, comparisons are as yet sound and true' (in Cust, 1931, pp. 346-347). From a significal perspective translation involves comparison, association and analogy among different fields and dominions

of knowledge and experience, among different sign systems. Therefore beyond the ordinary sense of shift from one historical natural language to another, Welby theorized translation in terms of interpretation, that is, interpretation of one sign with another. Knowledge, meaning and experience are generated and develop thanks to interpretive-translative processes thus described in the encounter among signs from different sign systems, linguistic and nonlinguistic signs, among different historical natural languages, among special languages and linguistic registers within the same historical natural language, etc. Indeed, all sign systems, all languages are already in themselves interpretation-translation processes as we are describing them.

Welby was commissioned to redact the entry 'Translation' for the *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology in Three Volumes* (edited by Baldwin, 1901-1905), in addition to the entries 'Sensal' (co-authored with George F. Stout) and 'Significs' (co-authored with Stout and James M. Baldwin). The entry 'translation' was published in 1902, and was formulated as follows:

> **Translation:** [Lat., *trans* + *latum*, part. of ferre, to bear, carry]: Ger. *Uebersetzung*; Fr. *traduction* (*transposition*); Ital. *traduzione*.
> 1) In the literal sense, the rendering of one language into another.
> 2) The statement of one subject in terms of another; the transference of a given line of argument from one sphere to another; the use of one set of facts to describe another set, e.g. an essay in physics or physiology may be experimentally 'translated' into aesthetics or ethics, a statement of biological into a statement of economic fact.

As Welby states in *What is Meaning?*, she used the term 'translation' because it was already in use, but in reality it only covers part of the sense suggested. Other terms beginning with the prefix 'trans' which indicate further aspects of the process she was describing include the expressions 'transference,' 'transformation,' 'transmutation,' 'transfiguration,' 'making translucent and transparent' and, above all, 'transvaluation' (see Welby, 1983 [1903], p. 126 n2, p. 153).

In a letter to Edmund Maclure written towards the end of the nineteenth century, Welby delineated a research project that developed ideas she had been carrying with her 'all or nearly all' her life, and which were generally in line with the findings of scientific progress of the time. Among the principles or notions forming her project, Translation was listed as point two with the following specification: 'Translation. Every part of experience, while evolving a dialect of its own, ought to be capable of translation into the others, and of being tested by this means' (Welby to Maclure, in Cust, 1929, 1889-1891, p. 265).

Welby formulated her conception of translation during the initial phases of her studies on language and expression. At the time she was specifically concerned with the need to update religious beliefs in terms of latest developments in the sciences, that is, to translate, update, verify and evaluate religious discourse in terms of scientific discourse. What we may call her interpretive-translative method was elaborated in strict connection with what she also called the 'analogical,' and in some cases, the 'homological' method (see below). However, it is also important to underline that translation as understood by Welby did not privilege a given special language as the 'target-language' over others. This reductive approach was adopted subsequently by the Unity of Science Movement, logical empiricism or neo-positivism, and by the Vienna Circle connected to the latter, according to which all languages (unless a question of formal languages) were to be translated into the language of physics, as the very condition of the possibility of producing sense. Welby's perspective was far broader and did not involve any form of reductionism. Welby's point was that translation from one system to another was instrumental to the development of meaning in all its nuances, of knowledge, critical consciousness and ultimately of significance. To this end serious discourse can be translated into comical discourse and viceversa, verbal or nonverbal discourse can be transferred from one universe of discourse to another, for example, from the social sphere to the political, etc. (Chapter XVIII in *What is Meaning?* is rich in illustrations from the daily newspaper *Westminster Gazette* and from literary discourse in particular from *Alice in Wonderland*, with results that are at once critical and parodical).

In chapter XVII of *What is Meaning?* Welby presented an experimental translation in relation to the question of analogy of parts of a 'Lecture on the Nervous System (1884),' by Dr. Hughlings Jackson. This experiment consisted in transposing a lesson on the nervous system into the language of religion making the discourse of physiology resound in religious discourse and, viceversa, making religious discourse resound in the discourse of physiology, as a means of verifying the validity of both. As Welby reports in the opening to her chapter, despite any limits her translation met with the approval of many scholars of the time including 'Sir J. Crichton-Browne, Dr. Mercier, and other alienists and medical authorities,' but also Dr. Hughlings Jackson himself and Professor Croom Robertson who had challenged her 'to obtain for such an attempt the endorsement of the experts in any subject' (see Welby, 1983 [1903], pp. 130-138).

With reference to the typology introduced by Roman Jakobson in his famous essay of 1959, 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation' (see Petrilli, 2003, pp. 17-20), Welby was concerned with translation firstly as a cognitive method, 'reformulation,' 'definition,' in a broad and plastic sense, and only consequently in the more obvious sense of shift from one language to another, 'interlingual translation.' Without ignoring the specificity of communication among different historical-natural languages, she considered this particular translative practice as part of the larger framework, a methodological perspective for the acquisition of new knowledge. Therefore, more than on *interlingual* translation or *translation properly understood* (shift from one language to another, interpreting verbal signs of a given historical-natural language by means of the verbal signs of another historical-natural language), to use Jakobson's terminology Welby's focus was on *intralingual* translation or *rewording* (interpreting verbal signs by means of other verbal signs from the same historical-natural language) and *intersemiotic* translation or *transmutation* (interpreting verbal signs by means of nonverbal signs and viceversa, as well as nonverbal signs of a given sign system with nonverbal signs of another sign system).

In the Table of Contents for a volume Welby was planning on writing, the name 'Vailati, etc.' was written in

parenthesis alongside 'Translation,' the title of Chapter One, Part Two (see Petrilli, 2006c, ch. I.2). Working in the same direction as Welby, the Italian mathematician and philosopher of language Giovanni Vailati (1863-1909) also theorized the cognitive-translative method. In his various essays he elaborated a method of comparison and confrontation among different languages and discourse fields, comparing, for example, the language of morals with the language of geometry, verbal language with the language of algebra, etc. (see Vailati, 1898, 1905, 1908). To compare different languages—whether a question of verbal or nonverbal languages, and if a question of verbal languages, of different historical natural languages or different special languages within the same historical natural language—means to gaze at each language through the eyes of another language acting as interpretant of the former, that interprets and develops it. This is the interpretive-translative method which characterizes Welby's own significal perspective and which she theorizes with Vailati in their correspondence (see letter by Welby to Vailati, 27 February 1907; for their correspondence, see WCYA, Box 18).

In W*hat is Meaning?*, Welby describes intellectual activity, progress in knowledge and experience in terms of the 'automatic process of translative thinking,' in which through the use of metaphor and analogy 'everything suggests or reminds us of something else' (Welby, 1983 [1903], p. 34). 'Translative thinking' converges with signifying and semiosic processes at large in which something stands for something else, its meaning, which is generated through the translation of signs into other signs, into different types of signs and different sign systems. Continuous translative-interpretive processes enhance our capacity for significance as they sharpen perception of unforeseen connections, discovery of knowledge and truth previously unknown. Translation in all senses is possible on the basis of a common element among differences, in other words on the basis of the relation of similarity, whether analogical or homological, uniting things that are apparently unrelated thereby enhancing meaning value, as anticipated, in terms of significance. As she says in Chapter XIX in *What is Meaning?*:

> The idea of Translation in all its applications naturally implies the recognition of Distinction, and starts from the conception (or principle) of Equation, which is in the quantitative what Translation (the discovery and application of the common element in the diverse or different) is in the qualitative sphere. Much work, like that done by Mayer and Joule, remains to be attempted on a different plane. But it is obvious that only within narrow limits can we expect to find mechanical or even logically perfect equivalence. And even if we did we might suspect (in the world of mind) that the one was the derivative or reflection of the other; that we had found the analogue of the mirror. This, of course, cannot be excluded from the domain of translation in its extended (signific) sense; but we must carefully understand its conditions.[3]
>
> But Translation may be helpful, that is, revelative and illuminative, when there is much less literal correspondence than in this case. It applies wherever there is a presumable unity implied in differences which can be distinguished.[4] What

3 [A good case of doubtful 'translation' seems to be afforded by Dr. Haacke, who 'seeks to prove that the mechanical conception of nature leaves room for faith in a moral order of nature, by showing that natural bodies and organisms, and human ideals alike follow a great law of tendency to equilibrium.' In his book (reviewed in *Nature*, April 2, 1896) 'Schopenhauer's "will to live" is replaced by the "will to equilibrate,"' and he shows that 'art, morality, and religion exhibit the tendency to unite various elements into an equilibrium, that is, in simpler language, into an organic system.' The reviewer, however, objects that 'Dr. Haacke apparently takes natural selection to be a force instead of a mere process according to which forces act, dismisses it for this reason, and sets up in its place an unreal striving after equilibrium, which equilibrium is only an effect.'

The kind of distinction which is nearest to actual identity may be illustrated by 12 + 8 = 15 + 5. Though these are both 20 there is a difference caused by logical perspective; we think the result in either way from either standpoint.]

4 ['He (Emerson) respects common-sense, and dreads to disturb his vague aspirations by translating them into a definite system. … (He) may even be translated into the phraseology of the humble "Lockist"' ('Emerson,' Leslie Stephen, *National Review*, Feb. 1901, p. 890).

The leaders of the Conservative party carry their sublime heads in clouds far above the common affairs of municipal life. They have never translated Imperialism into terms that fit these affairs, or thought out

> we want is neither an artificial mode of uniting the apparently diverse, discrepant, separate, nor an equally artificial postulate of primary identity which either ignores, minimises, or excludes distinction.[5]
>
> As Translation involves both unity and distinction (the one actually and the other implicitly), language must itself be recognised as the means of discovering contrasts together with the links which constitute them elements of unity, or at least completely exclude the idea of final disparateness. Even the wildest analogy which betrays itself in popular or inherited (and animistic) metaphor is seen as a serious effort to accomplish this rational duty, one in which, as a fact, the whole race at all stages of its psychological ascent shares. For a thing is significant, both in the lower and in the higher sense, in proportion as it is expressible through bare sign or pictorial symbol or representative action. In the higher sense (that of vital or moral or rational importance) it is significant in proportion as it is capable of expressing itself in, or being translated into, more and more phases of thought or branches of science. The more varied and rich our employment of signs (so long as such employment be duly critical, securing that we know well what we are doing, also the indispensable condition of humour), the greater our power of inter-relating, inter-translating, various phases of thought, and thus of coming closer and closer to the nature of things in the sense of starting-points for the acquisition of fresh knowledge, new truth. (Welby, 1983 [1903], pp. 148-150)

In the quest for significance, the identification of unity and distinction, unity and difference, convergences and divergences, among different disciplines and discourses, therefore common elements and specificities, singularities, favours the reciprocal clarification of concepts and terminology, and more generally the acquisition of knowledge. Translating methods, concepts, and

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social and economic problems from any independent standpoint' (*Times*, March 4, 1901).]

5 [An amusing instance of the double sense of translation occurs in the *Westminster Gazette* (Sept. 2, 1902), where the heading 'Chinese "Character" Mistranslated' may perhaps describe some diplomatic dealings with that enigmatic race, while it directly refers to a hitch in the verbal rendering of a treaty.]

terminology from one disciplinary area to another according to a perspective that is metadisciplinary and transdisciplinary, that is, by relating different disciplines in a system that remains open and detotalized, leads to progress in research, to innovation and scientific discovery by enhancing the possibility of identifying new links and connections, new correspondences, and therefore of discovering new truths, new results. If carried out systematically and with critical consciousness (as also maintained Vailati who shared Welby's views), even the simple reformulation of an expression in different linguistic registers and in different communicative contexts, the mere fact of reformulating a subject in terms of another, an utterance in terms of another from different fields of experience, theoretical and practical, contributes to this type of development as new meaning value emerges. By interconnecting with other signs in unending chains of semiosis according to the dialectics of the relation between similarity and difference, the sign is charged ever more with new and wider references and signifying nuances. In fact, we know that the more translation processes multiply, the more the cognitive capacity develops and the sign's expressive power is enhanced in terms of significance. In interpretive-translative processes thus described the sign is developed, enriched, criticized, set at a distance, placed between inverted commas, parodied or simply imitated, and, in any case, interpreted by another sign, its interpretant. Indeed, the more a sign is complex, rich in signifying and axiological potential connecting it to a passed tradition and opening it to future translations, understood in the broad sense as interpretation, the dialogical relation between sign and interpretant (see Ponzio, 2006b), the more it is difficult to establish the boundaries of a single sign or among different signs.

The interpretive-translative method is based on the identification of analogical relations between different signs and sign systems, whether verbal or nonverbal, and in addition to using analogies is also a method for discovering, creating, and testing them. Moreover, as says Welby, these are mainly of the proportional, structural and functional type. From this perspective the problem of translation is closely connected with the problem of iconicity in language, therefore of figurative language, and the role of metaphor, analogy and homology in the generation

of thought processes and communication. In fact analogy, comparison, association, figurative language at large, metaphors and similes are all considered by Welby as linguistic-cognitive devices realized through interpretive-translative processes for expressive empowerment in terms of significance. We know that she critiqued what she identified as bad linguistic usage, with particular reference to bad use of figurative language, which she considered as one of the main sources of prejudice, confusion and mystification.

Welby not only theorized the *analogical* method, but also the *homological* method, a term she borrowed from the biological sciences. The homological method consists in relating things that are distant from each other, that is, in tracing a common core uniting things that appear different and completely unrelated. Following scientific research in the fields of biology, psychology, and language studies, Welby identified a homological relation between organic life and consciousness, between organic life systems and language or verbal sign systems. '"Now, however, it may be said that we have to leave the field of analogy and enter that of homology",' specifying in a note citing Dr. J. Ward (Art. 'Psychology,' Ency. Brit., 10th edit.), '"Between organic development and mental development there is (…) more than an analogy"' (1983 [1903], p. 21, and n. 1).[6] Beyond surface resemblances and associations, the homological method searches for profound genetical, structural, functional and dynamical relationships among the terms of reference in question. Indeed, Welby warned against the tendency to exchange analogy or surface relation of similarity with homology or genetico-structural similarity. As she specified once again in Chapter XVI of *What Is Meaning?* returning to the problem of the relation between analogy, homology and translation understood as interpretive-cognitive method, what she calls 'inter-translation': '(…) there is a method both of discovering, testing, and using analogy (or in some cases homology), the value of which does not yet seem to be recognised; and this may be called in an extended sense Translation' (1983 [1903], p. 126).

6 Ferruccio Rossi-Landi identified a homological relation between the utterance and the artifact, between linguistic and nonlinguistic work (see Rossi-Landi, 1985, pp. 47-49).

Welby's own language is rich in figures of speech, in the use of simile and metaphors, in relations of analogy and homology with different spheres of experience, through which she clarified and developed her ideas, often advancing new hypotheses. Among the numerous examples of this type of translation which abound in her writings, the following passage from her book of 1911, *Significs and Language*, explores the concept of beauty and signifying value in verbal language on the basis of the relation of analogy with musical language (anticipating developments in contemporary experimental music):

> Language might in one aspect be called articulate music. And we may be grateful to the so-called stylists, although in their efforts after beauty they sometimes sacrifice instead of transfiguring significance, and always tend to defeat themselves by making significance secondary. For at least their work recognizes some analogy between the ordered harmony of music which we call attunement, and the true ideal of language.
>
> And thus we are reminded that as yet language in ordinary use barely rises above the level of noise, and only suggests the perfect natural harmony which ought to be its essential character. The reason for this, however, is not merely that in language we have failed to develop a full control of our 'singing' power, or that we are still content with the rude instruments of ancient days, although this is to a great extent true. We may put it in another way and, as already suggested, may say that in civilised speech we have acquired linguistic instruments of real complexity and implicit power to render subtle forms of harmony, but that it has never occurred to us to tune them together, to attune them. And we may suppose ourselves to have told one who suggested the need of this that the proposal was pedantic, and that to tune an instrument was to restrict its scope, as the ambiguity of tone and conflict of intention which reduces music to noise means a valuable freedom secured. We are liberating music by ostracizing the tuner enriching the language with grunt, squall, yell, squeal, and excruciating discord! (Welby, 1985 [1911], pp. 72-73)

2. Significance in Interpretive-Translative Processes

The more interpretive-translative processes multiply through the open network of signs, the more the signifying universe expands,

and with this our understanding of life. Significance increases as interpretive-translative processes increase through the sign network reaching ever higher degrees in signifying (or semiotic) resonance the higher the degree of otherness. On this account interpretation-translation is not only a question of identification but also of what with Mikhail Bakhtin we identify as 'answering comprehension' or 'responsive understanding,' which is inseparable from listening and opening to the other. The sign's meaning is engendered in the interpretive-translative procedures of signifying and communicative processes. Thanks to the continuous work of translation, the sign develops its meaning in another sign that transcends and enriches it. Therefore, the more the sign translates into different spheres of thought, branches of science, and fields of practical experience, always ready to transcend its own limits, the more it is 'plastic,' the higher the degree in cognitive power, signifying potential, and significance (see Petrilli and Ponzio, 2005).

The problem of translation read in the light of Welby's philosophy of interpretation and significance, underlines the reality of 'language' (understood as a modeling device, or in Welby's terminology, 'mother sense' or 'primal sense') and 'languages' (verbal and nonverbal) as dynamic and dialogic phenomena, capable of gazing at the universe dialogically and reciprocally interpreting it through the eyes of the other. Thanks to the ability of keeping account of and expressing a plurality of different viewpoints, language and languages are capable of creativity and critique: 'plasticity,' 'ductility,' 'flexibility,' or 'ambiguity' (understood in a positive sense) indicate qualities that characterize the semantic-linguistic sphere as theorized by Welby. In fact, such qualities are essential to maintaining interpretive and communicative adequacy of language and languages, their capacity for the acquisition of new knowledge, adaptation to new linguistic needs, to different communicative contexts, for critical consciousness. Interpersonal communication, communicative interaction, is possible thanks to the 'plasticity' of signs, to say it with Welby, thanks to their 'dialogism' and polylogism, to say it with Bakhtin (1981, 1986, 1990). Successful communication involves dialogic understanding which is grounded in the logic of otherness in the relation among interpretants. But even more

radically, from the perspective of significs, or what we may call 'biosignifics,' keeping account of the intimate interconnection theorized by Welby between significs and biology, such characteristics as 'plasticity,' 'ductility,' 'flexibility' are the condition for continuity and development of life itself over the planet, from which language and languages arise. This approach is very much in line with latest developments in the sign sciences as represented by biosemiotics and biophilosophy, and as developed today, for example, in terms of Thomas A. Sebeok's global semiotics (see Sebeok, 2001).

The significal approach to sign and meaning has important implications for our system of beliefs, for our certainties, in the last analysis, as anticipated, for the problem of truth. On Welby's account, truth is dialogical, that is, it can only be identified on the basis of what with Bakhtin we recognize as the *dialogic relation of otherness*, and as such is always open to interrogation. The capacity for approaching truth grows with the capacity for taking into account multiple viewpoints, voices and signs (see Petrilli, 1995, pp. 35-61). All this goes in the direction of reinforcing the interrelation between interpretation, translation and significance. In the words of Welby from Chapter XVI in *What is Meaning?*:

> All systems also inevitably concentrate in Significance as their essential value as well as test. And thus Significs alone gives us the power of inter-translation. As Giordano Bruno truly says, 'Certitude is only acquired by a kind of comparison, by conferring (in its true sense) one sensible object or one sense with another.' This is true in a richer sense even than he intended. What you say is true (1) in one sense; (2) in many senses; (3) in all but one sense, (4) in all senses; (5) in no sense (*i.e.* is nonsense or is false). 'For the same Truth may be in different subjects (…) and given us through diverse senses,' in both senses of that term. (1983 [1903], p. 120)

'Significance' according to Welby's terminology indicates the maximum expression value of a sign. As says Welby, 'all systems concentrate in Significance in their essential value as well as test. And thus Significs alone gives us the means of inter-translation' (1983 [1903], p. xxi). From the perspective of significs, the sign not only emerges as a cognitive entity, but

also as an axiological entity, as an expression of the relation of signs to values. The more a sign is subject to 'transference,' 'transformation,' 'transmutation,' 'transfiguration' and above all 'transvaluation' (which, as anticipated, evidence different aspects of translative processes), the more the sign translates consciously and dialectically, or better, dialogically, into other signs from different spheres of thought, knowledge, and practical experience, the more it translates into different languages, cultures and value systems, the more its significance, import and ultimate value increases. To be significant means to have value and concerns the ethical dimension of signifying processes.

Therefore what we must also underline is that translative-interpretive processes thus understood favour the development of semantic-axiological and metalinguistic consciousness, that is, of critical and what we may call 'semioethical' consciousness (see Petrilli and Ponzio, 2005; Deely, Petrilli, Ponzio, 2005). From the significal perspective, the word 'transvaluation' best conveys the idea of interconnectedness between translation, meaning, and cognitive-ethical processes, between translative processes and Welby's meaning triad 'sense,' 'meaning,' and 'significance' (these terms indicate a progressive advancement from the lowest to the highest grades in expression value in concrete situations of communicative interaction). As Welby says in *What is Meaning?*: 'There is, strictly speaking, no such thing as the Sense of a word, but only the sense in which it is used—the circumstances, state of mind, reference, 'universe of discourse' belonging to it. The Meaning of a word is the intent which it is desired to convey—the intention of the user. The Significance is always manifold, and intensifies its sense as well as its meaning, by expressing its importance, its appeal to us, its moment for us, its emotional force, its ideal value, its moral aspects, its universal or at least social range' (Welby, 1983 [1903], pp. 5-6). And, in fact, the attribution of sense to the object, of meaning to the sign, of significance to signifying processes in their globality is no less than the result of translation understood in terms of interpretive, cognitive and axiological procedure.

As a philosophy of significance, interpretation and translation, significs is also described by Welby as a 'method

of synthesis' valid both for science and philosophy, 'a method of observation,' as she says in *What is Meaning?*, 'a mode of experiment,' which includes 'the inductive and deductive methods' in one process, that is, what Vailati calls the hypothetical-deductive method and Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914) the 'abductive' or 'retroductive' method, which enable us to reach the highest levels of meaning:

> Significs, then, will bring us the philosophy of Significance; i.e. a raising of our own whole conception of meaning to higher and more efficient level; a bringing cosmos out of the present 'chaos' of our ideas as to sense, meaning, and significance, and showing us that we need to use these terms in a certain order of value and range. Its best type of metaphor is the 'solar,' its best mine of analogy is the biological; because, as implying an extension of purview given us in spatial form by (post-Copernican) astronomy, it tends to relate the idea of life to the ideas of motion and matter, and moreover to relate the idea of mind to both. Thus Significs involves essentially and typically the philosophy of Interpretation, of Translation, and thereby of a mode of synthesis accepted and worked with by science and philosophy alike; profoundly modifying what we wrongly call the 'root' ideas of religion, of ethics, of poetry, of art, and, lastly, of practical life in all forms. But if studied systematically it would be seen from the first to provide a method of observation, a mode of experiment which extends far beyond the laboratory, and includes the inductive and deductive methods in one process. There would never be any need to struggle that this view of things may supersede others; it could never be a supplanting system, and could never thus be attached to any individual name; it must necessarily be worked out by many co-operating minds. The principle involved forms a natural self-acting Critique of every system in turn, including the common-sense ideal. But also it gives the gist, the vital centre the growth-point of every existent organism of thought. It explains its own thinker to himself; it accounts for his thinking what he does as he does, and thus explains other thinkers to themselves. In fact, for the first time we gain a glimpse into what lies 'beyond the veil,' which both our own primitive and confused idea of Meaning and our modes of applying it have drawn over the world. The criteria thus reached will vindicate themselves alike to the most opposed of our thinkers. (Welby, 1983 [1903], pp. 161-162)

But to return to the relation between meaning (understood in the broad sense of the triad sense, meaning and significance) and the use of language, Welby's considerations also shed light on the relation between language (therefore text and utterance), the speaking subject, and significance. In the last analysis, her significal approach to meaning sheds light on the problem of communication and understanding, that is, critical and creative understanding, what with Bakhtin we have identified as *responsive understanding*, and with Peirce I would venture to call *agapastic understanding*.

If in oral or written communication we understand what is said, this is because comprehension is always achieved through interpretants that are not uniquely verbal. What we say is based on preceding verbal and nonverbal communication and is said as part of an extended network of signs in which any historical-natural language only occupies a very limited space. When we speak to communicate, this 'event' is possible on the basis of communication conditions established previously. We could make what would seem to be a paradoxical claim—but paradoxes serve to evidence how things stand—that when we speak to communicate communication has already occurred. This is true in the case of the production of both oral and written texts. Whether written or oral, speech does not install communication relations, but, if anything, ratifies, maintains, notifies, declares, or exhibits them, furnishing 'portmanteau words' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1999) which enable partners to mutually recognize each other, to stay in these relations, and to express the will to maintain and preserve them.

That which occurs is more or less the same as that which occurs in a love declaration: unless it is reduced to a purely conventional or formal act (in which case it is no longer a love relationship), a declaration of love is formulated when the love relationship already exists, so that the declaration is only a portmanteau word and anticipates a complementary portmanteau word as its reply. When a professor delivers a lecture in a university hall, for it to be successful a communication relation must already subsist; this professor may make the most original and exciting statements ever, but the first implicit statement recites 'this is a

lecture, accept it as such.' When a child begins communicating with its mother through words, communication with her already exists and is intense, this too being the necessary condition for learning how to speak.

If the utterance text were to constitute its very own conditions, if it were self-sufficient, independent from context, if it were not to depend on anything else but itself, this would mean that it is based uniquely on initiative taken by the speaking subject and on the linguistic system that subject employs. On the contrary, the word similarly to the subject does not have a priority in the construction of communication relations. Each time there is a subject, the word, therefore a text, communication has already occurred, and that which the subject says is relative to that communication.

To speak, to be a speaking subject, to act as a writer, is always to respond, and in fact all texts are responses, including the subject understood as a text. The subject and the text may constitute and decide anything, but not the conditions that make them possible. This already emerges from the fact that every time the subject speaks, every time it produces a text, it is responding. Furthermore, the text cannot constitute or decide anything about its reception, about its being heard or read. That to speak is to respond and that speaking can do nothing without presupposing that someone is listening, says clearly that initiative does not belong to the subject, to the I, but to the other: an other with whom the subject is already communicating, to whom it must respond and answer to/for. The terms of such response are not only verbal but, on the contrary, take place on the basis of relations and sign systems that cannot be reduced to linguistic-verbal signs alone. And, in any case, the other must grant listening as a primary condition with respect to communication as installed by the text.

Verbal action does not presuppose another verbal action. As stated, the word is a response, but that to which it responds—not at the superficial level of rejoinders in a formal dialogue—is not in turn a word, a text, but rather a communicative situation which was not produced by speech. The actions accomplished by words and texts at the level of communicative exchange, of the

'linguistic market,' presuppose social relations, communication relations which are not necessarily in turn relations among words and texts. In other words, the production relations of relations among words are not in turn relations among words.

An immediate consequence of what we have said so far is that verbal action is not only grounded in nonverbal communicative conditions, but presupposes them. We can even state that it is improper to speak of 'speech acts.' In fact, on our part we prefer the expression 'verbal *action*.' A distinction may be established between the terms 'act' and 'action': the latter concerns the subject, is connected with consciousness, is intentional, is programmed, already decided, and presupposes initiative taken by the subject; on the contrary, the act is what has already occurred before action thus understood. The subject is involved in the act, implied by it, has already been acted, decided, and is subject as in *subject to*. When the speaking subject does something with words, when it produces texts, when it fulfils verbal *actions,* the *act* has already occurred: the communicative action of words presupposes a communicative act that cannot be reduced to verbal actions as its necessary condition.

But the point we wish to underline in the present context is that if communicative action can decide its own *meaning*, it does not decide its own *significance*. Performative action can do things *because it is action interpreted as being significant*.

We have stated that to be significant means *to have value*. And value cannot be conferred by the same subject that signifies with its action. If in addition to having meaning the performative action of condemning becomes an event that changes things, this is because it is significant as well, it has value, weight, import. All this presupposes a preceding communicative act which confers such value. Performative verbal action is action which must be interpreted to have meaning; but in order to be performative action as well, that is, capable of having an effect, of modifying something else, such action must have already received an interpretation which is antecedent to the relation it constitutes at the moment of occurrence. Antecedence concerns interpretation which has already invested performative action with significance.

We know that the term 'significance' is used by Welby in triadic correlation with the other two terms, 'sense' and 'meaning.' Using this terminology, we could state that the 'meaning' of action presupposes 'sense' understood as a derivative of 'to sense' and not only as 'orientation,' 'direction.' In order to be performative, verbal action must be 'sensed,' 'felt,' if perhaps not by whomever accomplishes it, certainly by partners addressed by the speaker in a given communicative context. Differently from significance, 'sense' is associated with the senses, with feelings, with sentiments or passions. Instead, 'significance' refers to given values fixed and flourishing in a community, which may be more or less extended and comprehensive ranging, for example, from a minimal social community constituted by a couple to a city, nation, continent, etc. Therefore, in addition to sense as connected to listening, verbal action presupposes implied meanings, significance.

3. Welby's Translation Theory and the Conception of Language in Peirce, Bakhtin, and Wittengstein

'When you speak in one of them [essaylets] of Man as *translating* vegetal and Brute strength into intellectual and spiritual vigor, that word *translating* seems to me to contain profound truth wrapped up in it.' This is what Peirce says in a letter to Welby dated 14 March 1909 (in Hardwick, 1977, pp. 111). In fact, Welby's considerations, similarly to Vailati's, recall Peirce's interpretive-cognitive model according to which the meaning of a sign is developed by another sign, the interpretant, through interpretive-translative processes. The idea of amplification and enhancement of meaning through signs that defer to each other as conveyed by Welby is captured by one of her interpreters, L.P. Jacks, in his introduction to her 1931 book of correspondence, *Other Dimensions*: 'Like the universe, whose offspring it is, thought rests—so we learn—on no "foundations," but revolves in an endlessly "ascending spiral" to higher forms of itself, retaining its conquests and perpetually enlarging them' (in Cust, 1931, p. 11). Welby's interpretive-translative approach evidences the spirit of investigation that pushes mankind to question the nature of meaning and to probe the meaning of the universe itself, an attitude she fully captured with the question 'What does it mean?,' or 'What does it signify?.' In that question lies the generating

source of intellectual activity, the driving power of all that may be summed up under the name of philosophy. And again, as says the same Jacks interpreting Welby's thought system: 'The universe may be compared to a spoken sentence imperfectly heard, while philosophy is the attempt to articulate it more clearly, thereby revealing what it *means*' (in Cust, 1931, p. 12).

Peirce theorized a situation of 'infinite semiosis' proposing a sign model based on the relation of dialogic deferral among signs, in the light of which meaning is conceived, in its primary acceptation, as 'the translation of a sign into another system of signs, and which, in the acceptation here applicable, is a second assertion from which all that follows from the first assertion equally follows, and *vice versa*' (Peirce, 1931-1958, 4.127). According to the theory of infinite semiosis, the meaning of a sign is the interpretant sign in an open ended chain of *renvois* from one interpretant to the next. And just as for Welby everything suggests or reminds us of something else, in Peirce meaning is given in the transformation of one sign into another 'equivalent' or possibly 'more developed' sign (interpretant), with which we know something more. The interpretant sign further enhances the overall signifying potential of the preceding sign together with the interpreter's overall understanding of the previous sign. In other words, a sign subsists thanks to another sign acting as its interpretant, so that its meaning is its translation into another sign. The sign flourishes in relations of reciprocal translation and substitution among signs with respect to which the original sign is never given autonomously and antecedently. As Peirce himself had already explained in a letter to Welby of 12 October 1904:

> A sign mediates between the *interpretant* sign and its object. Taking sign in its broadest sense, its interpretant is not necessarily a sign. (…) But we may take a sign in so broad a sense that the interpretant of it is not a thought, but an action or experience, or we may even so enlarge the meaning of sign that its interpretant is a mere quality of feeling. (…) It appears to me that the essential function of a sign is to render inefficient relations efficient—not to set them into action, but to establish a habit or general rule whereby they will act on occasion. According to the physical doctrine, nothing ever happens but the continued rectilinean velocities with the

> accelerations that accompany different relative positions of the particles. All other relations, of which we know so many, are inefficient. Knowledge in some way renders them efficient; and a sign is something by knowing which we know something more. With the exception of knowledge, in the present instant, of the contents of consciousness in that instant (the existence of which knowledge is open to doubt) all our thought & knowledge is by signs. A sign therefore is an object which is in relation to its object on the one hand and to an interpretant on the other in such a way as to bring the interpretant into a relation to the object corresponding to its own relation to the object. I might say 'similar to its own' for a correspondence consists in a similarity; but perhaps correspondence is narrower. (Hardwick, 1977, pp. 31-32)

Developing Welby's position on translation in a Peircean key also involves the possibility of rereading the Peircean concepts of 'translation' and 'infinite semiosis' from the perspective of significs. This too is an exercise in translation. These concepts emerge in Peirce as the necessary condition for interrelation between sign theory and theory of knowledge; but it must also be borne in mind that significs supersedes all strictly cognitive boundaries in a dimension where the cognitive and the ethical at last come together. According to this approach, the concept of knowledge is not only developed in cognitive terms, but also in what with Welby we may call moralising and humanising terms. As says Welby in *Significs and Language*:

> There are probably many who dimly realize, and would provisionally admit, that our present enormous and ever-growing developments of mechanical power and command are there to be interpreted in terms of psychology. This must presumably affect not only the very minds which are conceiving and applying them to such tremendous and apparently illimitable purpose, but also the thinkers concerned with the mental sphere itself, its content and its range.
>
> We may thus suspect, if not actually infer, that human thought also is on the threshold of corresponding developments of power—developments to which the 'new birth' of scientific method in the nineteenth century was but the prelude and preparation. If, indeed, we deny this conclusion, or dispute this assumption, we may effectually hold such a development in arrest—or risk forcing it out in unhealthy forms—just as, three

> hundred years ago, the spirit of scientific discovery was fettered and retarded on the verge of its great career of achievement. The explanation is in part, if only in part, the same now as it was then. For in the pre-Baconian age the study of phenomena, the inquiry into 'the causes of things,' was not more inhibited by theological prepossessions and denunciations than by the dominance of an intellectual nomenclature which ruled reality out of the universe and confidently took its place in all disquisition or discussion upon Man and Nature. The forward step taken was largely the result of a breaking of the barriers created by traditional terminology, a pushing aside of fictitious formulas, and a coming directly into the presence of things in order to learn whatever they had to say 'for themselves'—and for the Whole. All the conditions—especially the supreme condition, an urgent need—are now existent for a second and similar forward step, but upon another plane and to higher purposes. For the fresh advance which now seems imminent, as it is sorely needed, should be no mere continuation of the Baconian search, the accumulation of data for a series of inferences regarding the properties of the material system as usually understood, but rather the interpretation, the translation at last into valid terms of life and thought, of the knowledge already so abundantly gained. While man fails to make this translation—to moralise and humanize his knowledge of the cosmos, and so to unify and relate it to himself—his thinking is in arrears, and mentally he lags behind his enacted experience. That we in this age do lag behind, and that we have thus far failed to achieve a great ad general act of translation, is a loss chiefly due to our unanimous neglect to understand Expression, its nature, conditions, range of form and function, unrealized potencies and full value or worth. And therefore the first message of what is now to be named Significs[7] is that we must amend this really inhuman fault; that we must now study Expression precisely as we have long been studying 'nature' and 'Mind' in the varying ranges of both these terms. (Welby, 1985 [1911], pp. 1-3)

Growth in knowledge which is paralleled by growth in significance, involves the accumulation of knowledge not only in quantitative terms but also in qualitative terms. As anticipated,

7 [For a definition of this term see the *Oxford Dictionary*, the *American Dictionary of Philosophy*, and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edit.]

this favours the development of conscious awareness in human beings. And with Welby we must also underline that such development favours the human sense of total responsibility towards life and semiosis pervading the entire universe.

This conception of translation recalls Bakhtin's research, as much as he did not directly theorize the problem of translation. For Bakhtin as well, semiosis or sign activity is an open process of deferral and transferral of signs into other signs, a 'dialogic relation' among signs. As such semiosis cannot take place outside interpretation / translation processes. Both Welby and Bakhtin believe that the speaker develops consciousness and expressive capacity through continuous 'translation' processes from one sign to another, necessary to the development of linguistic and nonlinguistic consciousness, of experience and knowledge generally. In the conception of both researchers, such processes are ever more innovative and creative the higher the degree of dialogism and otherness in the relation between the translated sign, or the 'interpreted' sign, and the sign that translates it, the 'interpretant,' the 'translatant.' Similarly to Welby, Bakhtin too underlines the importance of gazing at one sign system with the eyes of another sign system (referring also to the relation between verbal and nonverbal signs, as in the case of the transposition of the nonverbal signs of carnival into the verbal signs of carnivalized literature), of gazing at a given language with the eyes of another, of considering a literary genre, or more generally a discourse genre, with reference to another, and so forth.

With respect to the problem of figurative language, a leitmotif throughout all her research itinerary, Welby motivated her interest by underlining that 'while language itself is a symbolic system its method is mainly pictorial' (Welby, 1983 [1903], p. 38). And again she claims that '[…] a thing is significant, both in the lower and in the higher sense in proportion as it is expressible through bare sign or pictorial symbol or representative action' (Welby, 1983 [1903], p. 150). By referring to one of the most important triads introduced by Peirce in his classification of signs, the tripartition of signness into symbolicity, indexicality and iconicity (see Peirce, 1931-1958: 2.247-2.249; and Peirce's letter to Welby of 12 October 1904, in Hardwick, 1977), we may

translate or reformulate Welby's statement as follows: if verbal language is a conventional system, its method is above all iconic. In other words, Welby, like Peirce, fully recognizes the fundamental role carried out by iconicity in the development of both verbal and nonverbal semiosis, in particular the importance of the iconic relation of hypothetical similarity in verbal language.

Moreover, Welby's position on this specific problematic may be related to the research of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) as formulated in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. We do not know whether there was any form of direct contact between Welby and Wittgenstein, but most certainly there were indirect connections, given that they had common acquaintances including the philosophers Bertrand Russell, Philippe Jourdain, Samuel Alexander, and that they moved in the same cultural circles connected above all to Cambridge University (see Nolan, 1990, pp. 96-98). In addition to conceptualizing language in terms of activity and function, to recognizing the determining role of context in the communicative situation, and conceiving theory of meaning also in terms of cognitive therapy, both scholars identify in analogy and the relation of similarity a determining aspect for communication and the constitution of linguistic signifying processes generally. Wittgenstein distinguished between 'names' and 'propositions' analysing the relation between 'names' or 'simple signs' used in the proposition, where the object or meaning is of the conventional order (see Wittgenstein, 1922, pp. 202). Welby too spoke of simple signs, of 'bare signs.' In Wittgenstein's view, the rule or code that relates the sign to the object to which it refers is conventional, that is, arbitrary, and therefore cannot be discovered simply by guessing (we know that sign arbitrariness is a category proposed by Ferdinand Saussure [1857-1913] in *Cours de linguistique générale*, 1916, to characterize the relation between *signifiant* and *signifié* in individual words, or in individual nonverbal signs forming 'conventional,' social codes). Instead, the relation of whole propositions or 'propositional signs' (Welby's 'pictorial symbol' and 'representative action') and that which they signify (their interpretants) is a relation of similarity, says Wittgenstein, that is, a relation of the iconic type. Analogously to Wittgensteins' 'proposition,' Welby's 'pictorial symbol' and 'representative action' are complete high level signifying units.

Similarly to Wittgenstein's analysis in the *Tractatus*, Welby's language analysis is not limited to describing phenomena of signification, language and thought, but rather aims to account for their generation. (In addition to convergences there are also important divergencies between their theories as clearly emerges with *Tractatus*. In this volume, for example, Wittgenstein elaborates an isomorphic conception of the relation between language and reality which Welby criticized and which Wittgenstein himself revised in the subsequent phases of his research as represented by *Philosophical Investigations)*.

The work of scholars like Welby and others so far mentioned contribute to illustrating the more complex levels of signifying, expressive and communicative processes, without reducing them to the mere status of information transmission and message exchange. Each of these authors calls our attention to the importance for signifying processes of iconism, otherness, and relations among signs beyond all systemic restrictions. This orientation also helps evidence the dialectical-dialogic nature of interpretive-translative processes in the relation between the categories of 'unity' and 'difference,' as Welby says, between the 'centripetal forces' and 'centrifugal forces' operating in language, as Bakhtin says (1981, 1986) and, therefore, between the power of centralization and decentralization, between monologism and polylogism, monolingualism and plurilingualism, respectively oriented by the logic of identity or the logic of alterity. Thanks to such dialectics, knowledge and truth are never given once and for all, but, on the contrary, are open to investigation and subject to modification in the continuous work of adapting to new contexts and communicative practices, beginning from everyday life.

Developing Welby's intuitions in the light of recent studies in language theory and the sign sciences generally, we can state that semiosis, that is, the situation in which something functions as a sign, is not possible without translation, indeed semiosis itself *is* a translative-interpretive process. The role of translation is fundamental in the constitution itself of sign, both verbal and nonverbal, in the determination itself of meaning.

The interconnection between signs and translation emerges when we posit the category of replaceability, that is, the possibility of being said otherwise (whether verbally or nonverbally), as a necessary condition for signhood, that is, when the sign is considered not only as something that replaces something else, but that may also in turn be replaced by something else. In other words, processes of replacement and transposition do not involve exclusion of sense, but rather shift in sense and therefore reciprocal signifying enhancement among signs. Consequently, meaning may be defined as a class of verbal and nonverbal sign materials which 'say' of each other, that is, which reciprocally defer to each other. Each term is either an interpretant sign or an interpreted sign of the other, depending on signifying context, in semiosic processes in which the interpretant sign replaces the interpreted sign which it somehow develops. Identity of the sign requires continuous processes of shift and deferral: to be this sign here, a sign must always be interpreted and become other thanks to the interpretant sign that interprets it.

4. Translatability and Common Meaning

The following passage from Chapter XVIII in *What is Meaning*? theorizes interlingual translation as part of the larger context where translation is understood in a broad sense as converging with life processes, beyond the boundaries of historical-natural languages. It also points out the importance of the concept of the 'common character' uniting different languages, the 'community of nature' in Welby's language theory, a signifying area she also indicated with the expressions 'common sense,' 'common meaning,' 'common language.' These concepts are interesting to read in light of research by Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1921-1985) on signs and language, in particular his concepts of 'common speech,' 'linguistic work,' and in a more mature phase of his theory, 'social reproduction' (see Rossi-Landi, 1961, 1968, 1985, 1992a). Says Welby in *What is Meaning?*:

> Translation considered as mental digestion renders foreign substances innocuous if not actually nourishing. Digestion (next to vibration turned into sense-product) is the ruling example of translative change. Even waste product manures the glorious rose, the corn, the vine, etc., and water, through the agency of

'life,' becomes sap, grape-juice, wine. For in the larger sense wherein it is here used, translation includes transformation.[8]

But we think that to digest what we have read, marked, and learnt does not mean that we ought to expect results from acting thus, analogous to the results of actual digestion. The consequence is that this metaphor actually hinders us in expressing what we mean. We look for what, judged by our own figure, we cannot have. Digested food is profoundly changed by the process. If I say, 'I will carefully weigh your statement after sifting the evidence you have brought,' I give you quite a different impression from what you would have received if I had said, 'I will carefully sow, cultivate, and then eat and assimilate your statement, and let you know the result.' The latter alone refers to digestion: sifting and weighing belong to quite another order of ideas. At present a really illustrative use of metaphor would often read like burlesque. But this is a great loss.

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8 [It is worth remembering that not only can you translate the serious into the humorous and *vice versa* (though the later is too seldom done) but you can translate from one sphere of humour into another. E.g. Alice in Wonderland translated by the *Westminster Gazette,* pictures and all; a perfect example of translation from the social into the political sphere.

Again Darwin's *Expression of the Emotions* has stimulated and indeed started a good deal of research into the origin of emotional signs; but we do not enough notice the importance of the translation of these which is always going on. The history of the licking of a dog, of a kiss, of an arm round the neck or 'waist,' of stroking, even of a loving smile gains a new ethical significance when we realise that these and other signs of attachment and even tender or passionate affection have been translated from savage violence and the natural expressions of hatred or contempt; while the trembling, faintness, and tears of sudden joy or thankful relief were originally signs of suffering or terror. The lesson here seems to be that we are utterly wrong in trying merely to eradicate evil tendencies in children or savages; what we have to aim at is always the translation of these into the corresponding good. But until the wide application of the term, especially in training, is realised, we cannot hope to effect this.

In one case, however, it has been successfully done for practical purposes. The sheep-dog's enthusiasm in guiding and guarding the flock which he has been trained to supervise is the translation into its converse of the wild dog's instinct to hunt, scatter, and destroy them. It is said that the intense energy with which the collie pursues his translated vocation makes him liable, unless precautions are taken, to die prematurely of heart-disease.]

It is obvious that in the literal sense the translation of one language into another (and the degree in which it is possible) depends on the ultimate common character of the two. In this case that community of nature is settled already. We admit that the languages are human, and that therefore they belong to the same category; the differences are all secondary. Thus the translation whether good or bad must always be valid, justifiable; we discover that we have one thing in two forms. And this conclusion is only strengthened if we refer to the original meaning of translation, which is spatial—a transference of position. But there is another sense in which translation of this kind may necessarily fail, because it cannot convey the subtle context of association, that Significance which is the highest form of meaning. As Jowett well says, 'The famous dispute between Nominalists and Realists would never have been heard of, if, instead of transferring the platonic ideas into a crude Latin phraseology, the spirit of Plato had been truly understood and appreciated.'[9]

Translation, again, may be admirable from the linguistic, the grammatical, and idiomatic point of view, and yet detestable from the literary standpoint. Only when it is admirable from the highest point of view does it become a version. And the typical example of this is the authorised translation of the Old Testament.

As well remarked in an article in the *Times* on 'The Poetry of King Alfred,'[10] 'the originality which is felt in Alfred's work through the guise of translation consists largely in his masterful transformation of his text, like a man whose purpose is well known to himself and is remote from aims merely literary.' The instance taken is the passage in which 'the position of the Earth in the celestial system is likened to the yolk in an egg':

> similar to what we see in an egg;
> the yolk in the midst, and yet gliding free,
> the egg round about. So all the world resteth
> still in its place, while streaming around
> water-floods play, welkin and stars;
> and the shining shell circleth about,
> day by day now as it did long ago.

9 [Plato, vol. IV, p. 39 (3rd ed., 1892).]

10 [August 20, 1901.]

> The writer continues: –'But in this simile of the egg the text has no part; it is a solid addition from his own stores, and it illustrates the purpose of his mind. He is seeking to convey great ideas by easy and familiar means; he is seeking to bring down the lore of the philosopher to the comprehension of his untutored folk. The egg manifests this purpose in a concrete and conspicuous manner, and it is a typical example of his teaching.' Here we have a case of conscientious analogy.
>
> Just as it is the human prerogative to translate the organic form of appreciating what sign signifies into the intellectual form of intentionally interpreting symbol, and to translate sense-impression into the terms of its excitant, so it is the highest form of that prerogative to translate the intellectual form of interpretation into what for want of a better term may be called verified or disciplined mysticism, that which has passed through the ordeal of science.[11] Also 'mysticism' is often the raw material, or at least the forerunner, the 'onseeing' of science. The dreams of alchemy have thus been transmuted into the achievements of chemistry, its prayer has been answered in an unexpected sense; it has been itself transmuted from base metal into gold; the dreams of astrology have become the realities of astronomy. We have reached no final limit in either, and are warned that the progress of science is never linear, but that the next advance (as in the biological 'tree') may involve new direction in departure. And direction is often more important than distance. (Welby, 1983 [1903], pp. 143-147)

Welby identifies a common element in experience in the human world, which she calls 'common meaning.' Common meaning is the condition for both singularity and universality in human signifying processes. In other words, it indicates the signifying material making possible the individuality or singularity of a sign, its specificity, its otherness and, at once, its universal validity for mankind. Common meaning indicates common signifying material, what we can also call 'semiotic material' relevant to the great multiplicity of languages, or special languages forming a single historical-natural language, as well as to different historical-natural languages, cultures and sign systems. Common meaning is the originating source of signifying processes through to the highest degrees of significance. It is

11 [There are many signs of the advent of this, notably in recent articles in *Nature*.]

the common foundation to all intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic communication. In the face of what would seem to be major or minor areas of untranslatability among different languages, 'common meaning' is that which makes translation possible (see Petrilli, 1995, ch. XII; Petrilli, 2003a).

We said that common meaning can be related to the concept of 'common speech' elaborated by Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1961), which does not converge with the concept of 'ordinary language' elaborated by English analytical philosophy. Indeed the latter only represents one aspect of what Welby understood by 'common meaning,' or Rossi-Landi by 'common speech.' Welby formulated her concept of 'common meaning' in the early stages of her research as emerges, for example, from a letter to Thomas H. Huxley written between 1882-1885:

> If I were trying to talk your language it would risk the absurdity—worse, the confusion—of 'English as she is spoke'; but may I not ask you in virtue of what underlies all sectional diversity of speech, to look through my language as I look through yours, putting aside merely technical or secondary meanings, and seeking the *common meaning* [my own emphasis] of all human or natural utterance?
>
> (…) I feel that to antedate a coming time, when we may learn the universal scope of the 'principle of translation' and share each other's truth as we speak each other's tongue, may be to risk the violation of one of the deepest of divine laws. (Welby / Huxley, 1882-1885, in Cust, 1929, p. 102)

'Common meaning' indicates a sort of a priori of language in the Kantian sense, a level of reference common to all languages, whether historical-natural languages or special languages, a series of operations constituting the condition itself for expressivity and communication through verbal (and nonverbal) signs. The expression 'common' indicates communion in the existent, an a priori (primal sense, see below), an a priori community with respect to the very differences it generates. All language users whether they are learning, teaching, translating, or simply conversing, activate common signifying processes and common empirical procedures that constitute a common ground and allow for shift from one universe of discourse to another, making communication

possible within and among different historical natural languages, within and among different special languages and everyday colloquial languages. Common meaning, as conceived by Welby, refers to all the common signifying operations that are necessary to speech and communication among human beings. It concerns all fundamental similarities, all homologies in biological and social structure uniting human communities beyond historical-cultural and geographical differences and their local variations.

In addition to common meaning, Welby also used such expressions as 'common language' and 'common sense.' With such expressions her intention was neither to underrate the great multiplicity of different languages, diversity among languages, nor reconduct such plurality to some mythical original language, to a sort of *Ursprache*, to the universal linguistic structures of *Logos*, or to some biological law governing and unifying all human languages. Welby explicitly criticized all attempts at overcoming diversity among languages and expression through appeal to a universal language, when such diversity was perceived as an obstacle to communication and mutual understanding. Indeed, she believed that variety and plurality among languages, dialects and jargons favoured reciprocal enrichment and further development of our linguistic-cognitive resources. Appeal to a universal language, whether a question of imposing an already existing natural language or of constructing an artificial language *ex novo*—granted such a thing were possible, was only an apparent solution to the question of diversity. In reality, linguistic and expressive diversity at large needed to be appreciated and explained, while problems deriving from difference and diversity called for attention and categories capable of accounting for difference and the interconnection with universality. This was a far cry from the idea of imposing a universal language. Indeed, the concepts of 'common meaning,' 'common sense,' 'common language,' and 'common speech,' as conceived by Welby (and similarly to Rossi-Landi, see his monograph of 1961), provided appropriate tools to deal with such issues. These tools were intended to *explain* linguistic usage and not merely describe it, which instead was to prove to be the limit of Oxonian analytical philosophy.

In fact, these expressions refer to similarity in function carried out by different languages for the satisfaction of analogous needs of expression and communication. Different languages offer different expedients, solutions and resources to satisfy expressive and communicative functions that are essentially similar, while at once expressing the singularity of each language, system and universe of discourse. Rather than impose an artificially constructed universal language which meant to level linguistic-psychological-cultural differences, Welby recognized an important resource for signifying, interpretive and communicative processes in these very differences and the practices associated with them. Thanks to 'common meaning' in Welby's vision of the linguistic and non-linguistic world, differences (which generate other differences in an open, detotalized and continuously evolving totality) are not the cause of division and silence, but, on the contrary, call for interconnection, intertranslative processes which favour mutual understanding and communication across different languages, cultures, and value systems. As she says in *What is Meaning?*:

> Granted, then, that an advance in our powers of expression, an enrichment of the resources of language, a greater mastery of significance, clearer apprehension of needless obstacles to mutual understanding, more effective consensus in all these directions is desirable: how are we to begin? The difficulty is that hitherto everyone who has been at all alive to the serious consequences of our present lack of mutual understanding has thought of it almost exclusively from the point of view of the inconvenience resulting from diversity in civilised languages. Many proposals of suggestions have been made for the acquisition of an universal language; and even now the adoption of neo-Latin as a common language for philosophical as well as scientific purposes is being urged as meeting a crying need. But I venture to suggest that, except in a limited sense or as a temporary expedient, that would be beginning at the wrong end.
>
> For even if the whole civilised—or intelligent—world could be brought by means of some great international movement to unite in the formation and consent to the use of such a language,—whether an old language adapted or a new one constructed,—it could at best but touch the surface of the question, and might indeed easily tend, by engendering

> content with unworthy ideals, still further to hamper and discourage that development of linguistic resources for which at present the very variety of tongues and dialects must indirectly make. Many 'ways of putting it,' ancient and modern, are at least now at man's disposal. With an artificially introduced and sanctioned universal language, imposed upon us at our present stage of linguistic development, much of this precious psychological heritage would wither and be wasted and lost. It may be that the world cannot do without that opulence of distinction in idiom which makes for richness in human life as a whole. This opulence arises from and issues in difference of practice, themselves valuable as providing the means of dealing in various ways with the emergencies of the future. The problem surely is, how to keep this priceless treasure without allowing it either to divide us, or to silence that which, being everywhere the highest thought of the highest man, is most of all worthy of expression. (Welby, 1983 [1903], pp. 211-212)

Welby did not search for monological or monolinguistic solutions to the problem of language difference and diversity. To signal an example from our own time, Chomskyian linguistic theory (differently from his work on ideology and social theory) prescinds from communicative function, that is, from the social and intersubjective dimensions of communicative processes. In fact, to explain the speaker's capacity to produce a potentially infinite number of sentences on the basis of a finite number of elements, Noam Chomsky (1985) postulates the existence of a universal and innate generative grammar whose structures are biologically inscribed in the human mind, and is activated by experience that is given and simply functions as a stimulus. On the contrary, from the perspective of Welby's significs and her interpretive, or better, pragmatic-interpretive approach to problems of meaning and communication, experience clearly emerges as the result of interpretive practices. By interpretive practices is also understood inferential processes of the hypothetical order, where inductive and deductive methods are included in one process, says Welby, hypothetical-deductive inference, as says Vailati, abductive or retroductive reasoning, in Peirce's terminology. Through such interpretive processes the subject completes, organizes and associates data that is always more or less fragmentary, partial, and incomplete. Experience is all these interpretive operations. As such it is innovative and qualitatively superior with respect to

data input, that is, to the historical and social material in which linguistic and non-linguistic interpretive work of preceding generations is sedimented. And once the abductive dimension of experience is evidenced, including the dialectical relation with competence, language learning and linguistic competence no longer need to be explained in terms of an innate universal grammar. On the contrary, we can make the claim that language acquisition is possible on the basis of abductive inferential processes.

Welby denounced the acritical use of language, whether a question of ordinary language or of special languages, including the languages of metadiscourse. As she states, for example, in Chapter XVIII of *What is Meaning?*:

> One of the main results of the backward state of language and the prevalent 'mislocution' is, of course, the unconscious see-saw of senses and meanings which goes on between the usages of the common-sense or practical man in the ordinary intercourse of life, and the usages of the scientific and philosophical teacher. The former freely uses words like Sense, Sensation, Feeling, Matter, Force, Mind, Will, in all sorts of 'senses,' according to the impulses inherited or acquired at school. These 'senses' are usually called out or suggested by experience which varies almost endlessly with age, circumstances, health, etc. The same thing happens with short sentences or conventional phrases embodying such terms. (Welby, 1983 [1903], p. 140).

Welby reflected on the use of the term 'plain,' criticizing the myth of 'plain meaning,' which was an important element in the construction of her own conception of language and of the world: 'For one thing meaning is not, and that is "plain" in the sense of being the same at all times, in all places, and to all' (Welby, 1983 [1903], p. 143). She underlined the semantic plasticity of the term 'common,' and with such expressions as 'common meaning,' 'common sense,' 'common language,' and 'common speech' she aimed to identify the conditions of language-thought that make linguistic usage possible. Rather than a description of real processes, of the world as it is, these concepts are part of a theoretical construct, a model and method with interpretive functions, a hypothesis applicable to different languages. From this

perspective Welby's work is rich in intuitions that foreground the research of such scholars as Rossi-Landi and his own concept of 'common speech,' or his critique of the concept of 'use' elaborated by Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations*. According to Rossi-Landi, Wittgenstein analyses the language unit as though it were already given prescinding from the real processes of social production from which these units ensue (see Rossi-Landi, 1968, Eng. trans.). Rossi-Landi developed the concept of 'common speech' in terms of work, that is, 'linguistic work,' and subsequently in terms of 'social reproduction' (see Rossi-Landi, 1961, 1985, 1992). In fact, with his notion of 'linguistic work' he too intended to explain and not simply describe linguistic use.

The idea of common signifying material concerns the system of techniques forming the necessary conditions for expression and communication, and which in their repeatability and constancy are common to all human beings. As such, this material does not have national and cultural boundaries, but, on the contrary, is transnational and transcultural. Indeed, to impose a universal language would mean to start from the wrong end, says Welby. 'Common meaning' or 'common sense' is not the theoretical expression of the historical processes of linguistic and ideologic unification and centralization, of the 'centripetal forces' of language, as Bakhtin would say, nor is it connected to the abstract notion of *langue*. As maintains Rossi-Landi (1961, p. 169) in his critique of the dichotomy between the system of language and individual speaking, between *langue* and *parole*, between that which is permanent in language and innovation, between *inventum* and *inventio*, the notion of common speech, understood as the constant and reproducible elements of language, language-in-general, human linguistic work, cannot be reduced to one only of the two poles forming these dichotomies, but involves them both.

Rossi-Landi's notion of 'common speech' serves as an interpretant of Welby's own common sense or common meaning hypothesis, which it clarifies and develops. Another interpretant according to a line of thought that further develops Rossi-Landi's research and which seems to lead to where Welby was headed, and, above all, clarifies how communion, commonality, community is

the very presupposition for difference, is the notion of semiotic materiality. This expression indicates a common foundation, a non conventional community, open and far more extensive than a community based on the logic of identity. A community that unites different elements on the basis of common irreducible otherness and not of common identity—whether of class, profession, nation, history, memory, ethnicity, religion, politics, race, gender, species.

Given that languages belong to the 'same category' and express needs that are common to humanity as much as they are differentiated, Welby, like Rossi-Landi, believes that translation is always possible. However, whilst a translation may be 'good' or 'bad,' it must always be 'valid' and 'tenable.' In this case translation into the target language offers another way of more or less saying the same thing, developing initial meaning into a new interpretant. The original meaning of the term itself 'translation' understood as 'transferral of position' is a spatial concept, says Welby, and underlines the concept of the multiplication of viewpoints with respect to a single sign thanks to translation processes.

Welby distinguishes between 'translation' and 'version': a 'translation' may be admirable from a linguistic, grammatical and idiomatic point of view, or detestable from the literary point of view. Only when rendition is good on a literary level as well, in aesthetic terms, can we speak of a 'version.' However, the translator is destined to fail in his work if s/he does not succeed in rendering the significance of the original text in terms of the target text; the system of values expressed in the original, which is strictly connected with the cultural context in which it is conceived, must find expression in the translated version of that same text. But, obviously, not even a translation that is 'good' and not just 'valid' involves a relation of perfect correspondence, of identity among interpretants from different languages. Indeed, Welby posits the categories of difference and otherness as a necessary condition for the happy realization of any translative process whatsoever. In fact, as she observes in Chapter XIX of *What is Meaning?,* even when terms are as close as they can be to 'actual identity,' the relation between them always involves a margin of difference. To

exemplify, Welby indicates the logical procedure of equation (12 + 8 = 15 + 5).

Moreover, to maintain the thesis of translatability does not imply that in the last analysis all languages are equal to each other, that underlying structures are identical to each other, or that vocables overlap to perfection. The thesis of translatability among languages, which also keeps account of the 'ultimate common character,' the 'community of nature' uniting different languages by virtue of the fact that they belong to the same category, that is, human languages, does not at all imply keeping faith to the principle of linguistic universalism. The latter reconducts the great plurality of different languages to a single language, the *Ursprache*, to universal linguistic structures, to innate mental structures and, lastly, to a monological view of reality (see Rossi-Landi, 1985, pp. 246-250, pp. 261-269). Instead, languages always maintain a margin of reciprocal otherness, not only in the obvious case of different natural languages, but also in situations of plurilingualism internal to the same language. Indeed, opening to difference, distancing, variation in viewpoint, linguistic register, discourse field, are all conditions for translation and expressivity across languages. All languages have their own specificity, are reciprocally other as much as they may be close in cultural terms, and all the same despite their otherness it is always possible to translate from one text to another. Indeed, translation is possible thanks to the relation of alterity (see Ponzio, 1981; Petrilli, 1994, pp. 103-107; Petrilli, 1995, ch. 3.2).

With specific reference to poetic language, while maintaining that poetry by definition cannot be translated, Jakobson himself maintains that even in the case of poetry translation *is* possible if translation is conceptualized as transposition: 'Only creative transposition is possible: internally to a given language (or from one poetic form to another), or among different languages. Or intersemiosic transposition is possible from one sign system to another: for example, from the art of language to music, dance, cinema, or painting (Jakobson, 1971 [1959], pp. 260-266). In spite of such limitations, and recalling Bakhtin, we can state that translation as 'transposition,' 'transferral of position,' as says Welby, is always possible, even if

not in terms of a 'version,' thanks to the action of otherness and dialogism in language.

When a question of translatability among historical-natural languages, to ask whether or not historical-natural languages communicate with each other is irrelevant. As close as two languages may be on the level of historical formation they do not communicate with each other. That two languages share common aspects either because they are familiar with each other or because they share a common past in terms of formation and transformation processes does not eliminate differences among them. Nor will there necessarily be overlap between the two distinct universes of discourse that these languages represent.

The right question to ask does not concern communication but *expressibility*. The problem of translatability is the following: can what be expressed in one language also be expressed in another? The reply should not be of the inductive order, that is, reached by verifying all cases, among all languages, thereby accumulating results case by case. Nor should it be of the deductive order, that is, made to derive from some theoretical premise or axiom, given that we are working in the sphere of the human sciences and not in some formal discipline. Instead, our reply must be of the abductive or hypothetical-deductive order. In other words, it must be reached on the basis of an inference, that is, a reply allowing for verification of the case in question on the basis of a given hypothesis.

In this sense, to translate (this impossible communication among historical-natural languages) is always possible. This conviction is based on the metalinguistic character of language, verbal and nonverbal. Interlingual translation occurs in territory that is common to all historical-natural languages, the verbal. It involves intraverbal translation as much as intralingual translation. Therefore, interlingual translatability occurs on common ground and involves common practices familiar to a speaker exercised in a single language, that is, the practice of transverbal expressibility.

Verbal sign systems are endowed with a distinctive feature which differentiates them from nonverbal special languages, that

is, the *metalinguistic* capacity. Verbal sign systems can speak about themselves, objectivate themselves, make themselves the object of discourse. Availability of multiple special languages within a single historical-natural language augments the possibility of metalinguistic usage. All the same, the degree of distancing, therefore critical awareness, between metalanguage and object language as permitted by plurilingualism internal to a single historical-natural language is inferior to distancing achieved when translating across different historical-natural languages. Therefore, if we consider the problem of translatability in terms of expressibility, we must inevitably agree that the relation with another historical-natural language favours expressibility and that translation is not only possible, but even augments the speaker's metalinguistic capacity.

On the other hand, to the extent that interlingual translation is intraverbal translation it is achieved on the basis of what, as anticipated, Rossi-Landi in 1961 (now 1998) called 'common speech.' This expression was introduced by Rossi-Landi to conceptualize a system of relatively constant human techniques, a system that is broadly international and not limited to national-cultural boundaries (Rossi-Landi, 1998, p. 165). The 'common speech' hypothesis clarifies that the relation of resemblance between the original-text and the translation-text, which translation must keep account of, is neither a relation of isomorphism nor of superficial analogy, but of homology. In other words, despite differences, the relation of resemblance, similarity or likeness bonding historical-natural languages is of the genetico-structural order and is determined by the fact that two texts from two different historical-natural languages share a sort of filigree, what Rossi-Landi calls 'common speech,' and Welby the 'common character,' the 'community of nature' uniting different languages, that is, 'common meaning,' 'common language.'

Thanks to the metalinguistic capacity of the verbal, it is always possible to reformulate what has been said, whether in the same special language or in the same historical-natural language and, even better, in a different special language and in a different historical-natural language. Translatability is

inherent in the verbal, a characteristic common to all historical-natural languages, and is possible thanks to 'common meaning.' This position opposes those conceptions that describe historical-natural languages as closed and self-sufficient systems, just as it opposes extremes in the description of differences among historical-natural languages in terms of 'linguistic relativity.'

The question of translatability must be connected to the problem of the meaning of a sign and to the fact that this cannot be circumscribed to a single type of sign or sign system. From this point of view translatability may be explained in terms of a semiotic order. In fact, with Welby and Peirce we have seen that translation is implicit in the concept itself of sign. A sign is not possible without an interpretant, that is, without another sign that somehow explicates its meaning. In other words, meaning subsists in the relation of reciprocal translation among signs.

Theoretically there are no limits on the interpretants of a sign, in other words, the meaning of a sign cannot be circumscribed by limits of a typological or systemic order. Each time there is meaning there is no type of sign or sign system that cannot be involved to furnish the sign with ulterior interpretants. Meaning and translation are semiotic phenomena whether interpretation-translation processes occur in the verbal sign system, among the sectorial languages of a single historical-natural language, among different historical-natural languages, among verbal and nonverbal sign systems, or among different nonverbal sign systems.

To understand the meaning of a verbal sign in our own historical-natural language or in a different historical-natural language means to activate interpretive processes involving interpretants which are not necessarily of the verbal order alone.

Therefore, to translate from one historical-natural language to another means to apply artificial limits, as it were, on the process: we search for interpretants exclusively among the verbal interpretants of the translating language of that which is said in a given historical-natural language. In the case of interlingual translation the point of arrival must necessarily be verbal, interpretants are chosen from the language into which we

are translating. However, on careful observation it is evident that limitation to verbal signs only concerns the goal of interpretive trajectories involved in interlingual translation, while the course of such trajectories is not at all limited to direct transition from one historical-natural language to another for nonverbal signs and value systems are inevitably also involved.

Translation difficulties should not be attributed to resistance of some sort by the text in translation. Translatability is the very condition of the life of signs. If difficulties arise this is because in the case of interlingual translation the interpretant is restricted to the sphere of the verbal, and even more specifically to the sphere of a single historical-natural language (the target language).

Translation difficulties do not arise so much from the fact that what is said in one historical-natural language must be transferred into another. The real difficulty lies in reaching an adequate understanding of the communicative act that renders the text in question possible, that renders it significant as a response, given that it is not self-sufficient and independent but presupposes more communicative relations than it actually installs. Before reaching the target language and finding an adequate interpretant, or translatant, the work of interpretation involved in translating a text implies a multiplicity of interpretants which not only do not belong to the target language but do not even belong to the source language. On the contrary, these interpretants must be traced in a great verbal and nonverbal sign network without any possibility of foreseeing which trajectories should be followed and which portions of the network should be explored.

As emerges from Welby's significal approach to the problem of translation, interlingual translation only concerns the point of departure and arrival, while all the intermediary interpretive work is of a semiotic order. The text can only be 'transferred' from one historical-natural language into another on the basis of intersemiotic translation. Beyond making two historical-natural languages communicate with each other, translatability depends on the explicitation of interpretants connecting the text in translation to communicative context.

5. Centrality of Translation in Semiotic Processes and Evolutionary Development

> A sign is only a sign *in actu* by virtue of its receiving an interpretation, that is, by virtue of its determining another sign of the same interpretant. (Charles S. Peirce, *Collected Papers,* 5.569)

In the first place to translate is to interpret. If we agree with Peirce that signs do not exist without an interpretant and that the meaning of a sign can only be expressed by another sign acting as its interpretant, translation is constitutive of the sign, indeed sign activity or *semiosis is* a translative process. Meaning is indissolubly interconnected with translation, in fact it is engendered in translative processes as evidenced by the description of meaning in terms of 'interpretive route' (see Petrilli and Ponzio, 2005). Moreoever, Welby describes the evolutionary processes of life in terms of translative processes of a qualitative order across these three levels of meaning according to an ascending degree in practical import, expressivity, and inferential capacity. In fact, development in knowledge and expressivity is not merely the result of accumulating data in quantitative terms, but rather of re-elaborating and transforming such data through the continuous action of translative processes in the same sign system and among different sign systems, verbal and nonverbal. However, translation as we are describing it does not only concern the human world, *anthroposemiosis,* but rather, more broadly, it emerges as a *constitutive modality* of semiosis, or, more exactly, biosemiosis. Translative processes pervade the entire living world, that is, the great biosphere. Indeed, as theorized by Welby, translation is no less than vital for life and its evolution in all its aspects. From this perspective, Welby's translation theory is a biotranslation theory.

Chapters XXII to XXVI in *What is Meaning?* are centred on problems relevant to the evolution of mankind. Among other things, in these and other writings Welby deals with the linguistic causes of superstition among primitive peoples (see, for example, Welby, 1890a, 1890b) describing the evolutionary development of mankind from what today in light of global semiotics (see Posner, Robering, Sebeok, 1997-2004; Sebeok, 2001) may be called a biosemiotic perspective, or more specifically with Welby

a biosignific perspective (though the terms 'biosemiotics' and 'biosignifics' are in a sense redundant given that global semiotics and significs are both constructed on the interconnection between the life sciences and the sign sciences). Welby examines special issues in the larger context of her rereading of evolutionary processes from a significal perspective, and describes the development of mankind in terms of interpretive-translative processes of thought, experience and behaviour into ever more complex and articulate intellective spheres, to the point where 'sense,' 'meaning,' and 'significance' at last coexist. To translate is neither simply to 'decodify' nor to 're-codify.' Such operations are no doubt part of translative processes, but they do not exhaust them.

The passage below is cited from Chapter XXV in *What is Meaning?* and together with Chapters XXII to XXVI (See Peirce's comments in his review of 1903, in Hardwick, 1977, pp. 157-159), focuses on evolutionary issues relating to mankind, anthroposemiosis, in the larger context of biosemiosis. In these chapters Welby reflects on the linguistic causes of superstition among primitive peoples in a significal key, therefore in light of her tripartition of meaning and its evolution across the levels of 'sense,' 'meaning,' and 'significance.' Different aspects of this meaning triad are identifiable on both the diachronic axis of evolutionary development as well as on the synchronic, in relations of interdependence among human beings forming specific socio-cultural systems:

> It may then be suggested that while the sense-scheme of the primitive mind was for obvious reasons more exclusively dominant than it afterwards became, and may be supposed to have reacted to more subtle appeals from the various realms of nature (as to the spinal was added the specifically cerebral type of response), the meaning-scheme, now so highly developed, was still embryonic; while the element of Significance, as we now at least tacitly recognise it, was not yet assimilated. In other words, the primitive form of intelligence may be supposed to have been sensitive to certain modes of energy, modes which it was incited to translate somehow into cult of some kind and then into formal doctrine; just as it was impelled to translate the sense of hunger into the taking of food, and, in a higher stage,

> to translate the whole experience into articulate statement. Only, in this last class of cases, the translation, as life directly depended upon it, had to be the right one; in the case of the more indirect forms of stimulus, the translation was purely tentative, and was thus liable to be grotesquely wrong. Even where its principle survives, on the one hand in the highest scientific, and on the other in the highest religious, poetical, or philosophical thought of our own days, its earliest applications were repulsive as well as fantastic.
>
> This, however, would be, from a signific point of view, just what we should expect to find. Man's sense—world includes much which requires the discipline of a meaning-sense to interpret rationally; and this sense, this sensitiveness to the meaning, intent, purport, purpose, 'end' of experience, direct and indirect, culminates in the sense—now become the recognition of Significance; of the import, the importance, the ultimate value, the supreme moment of all experience and all knowledge. (Welby 1983 [1903], pp. 193-194)

6. The Unpublished Papers of 1905-1911 on Translation, Interpretation, Significance

Victoria Welby insists on the question of translation and its centrality in interpretive processes and the generation of significance in some papers written during the last years of her life. The Welby Collection at the York University Archives contains a file entitled 'Significs and Translation (i.e. Definition)' (WCYA, Box 31, file 49), presenting a series of short unpublished papers dated from 1905 to 1911, edited for publication. All papers in this file, which we shall now briefly present, are appended to the present essay. Let me repeat that the title of this file may prove misleading. It should not be understood as conceiving translation merely in terms of definition, or reformulation as understood by Jakobson, but as reflection on and formulation of an approach to translation theory and practice which Welby understands in the broadest sense possible, what we have described as a significal and biosemiotic approach, and certainly inclusive of Jakobson's concepts of 'intralingual,' 'interlingual,' and 'intersemiotic' translation.

In a paper of 13 March 1905 entitled 'Significs and Translation,' Welby focuses on the problem of evolution in

terms of translation (on a scale progressing from the general to the specific: evolution of the universe, humanity, mind, human intelligence, expression, etc.). In fact we know that Welby did not limit the problem of translation to the problem of shift from one language to another (interlingual translation), but far more broadly she theorized translation in terms of translative processes across different universes of discourse as well as across different types of sign systems, verbal and nonverbal. From a significal perspective, translation-interpretation involves processes of differentiation and specialization in sense and signifying function. Such processes are perfected with the appearance of mind which involves development of the analytical and critical capacities, therefore of the capacity for differentiation and construction. However, such processes do not involve the introduction of barriers and separations which, according to Welby, are human inventions introduced for the sake of analysis, but do not exist in nature. In Welby's view, a condition for development is the recovery of the 'intertranslative' capacity among different discourses, senses and sign systems, which occurs in the constant and necessary dialectics between the tendency towards concentration, on the one hand, and continuity on the other, between unity and distinctions. To the same type of dialectics is also subject the development of significance which is engendered through 'intertranslative' processes among different senses, functions and values.

In 'Translation "Upwards",' a paper of 25 November 1907, Welby returns to theorizing the processes of evolutionary development from organic activity to mental activity in terms of translation. In 'A Badly Needed Translation,' 11 June 1908, she continues theorizing the idea of uninterrupted translative processes across the different realms of life. Evolutionary development is possible on the basis of translative processes from organic life to the life of the intellect. Welby underlines the need to recover the relation of dependency of mind upon biological life, as the condition for continuity of translative processes through to the highest levels of significance (see also her untitled paper in this file dated 11 November 1911).

The paper entitled 'The Snares of Translation' organized in the form of a dialogue among various voices (an argumentative expedient often used by Welby in her writings) focuses on the

problem of interlingual translation. Meaning is never absolutely simple, literal, neutral or univocal, but rather is figurative and intonated, therefore the meaning of words in translation processes from one language to another is not preestablished and cannot be taken for granted. Moreover, words frequently derive from other languages, as a result of loans and shifts from other languages, dialects, and universes of discourse. The implication is that we cannot escape the metaphorical and figurative dimension of meaning, that we must be aware of the action of 'multiplex' terms in linguistic practice, in the spheres of ordinary language as well as in specialized languages. With specific reference to translation processes across languages, and in light of the nature of meaning which shifts, develops, or loses force at the very moment of use, a classification of correspondences among terms from different languages could never be exhaustive nor definitive, and therefore is useless. Welby considers juridical discourse and the difficulties involved in translating terms from the English language that are not original to it into French, e.g., *verdict*, *jury*, *sentence*, *conveyance*.

In 'What is Translation?,' Welby establishes an analogy between the traveller who transfers himself across space in a physical sense and the transferral of meaning from one language to another. In this light, translation is described as the 'power of making an identical statement or description in different terms,' which enhances our 'powers of dealing with the world by acquiring the power of common understanding.' But this does not mean to augur a utopian world where a 'common language' is spoken with the introduction of an international language. The idea of developing artificial languages was at the centre of debate during the second half of the nineteenth century and became a trend of the times. A primary concern was to overcome barriers and separations presented by languages to the ultimate end of avoiding conflict and even war. Elsewhere we have discussed H.G. Wells's vision of a Utopian tongue in relation to Welby's view of language (see Petrilli, 2006b). Esperanto, the best known artificial language at the time, was introduced by Ludwig L. Zamenhof (1859-1917) in 1887. La Langue Bleue or Bollak was introduced between 1899-1902 by Leon Bollack (1859-?). New Latin may be 'Latine sine flexione', also know as Interlingua, was introduced in 1903, by the Italian mathematician Giuseppe

Peano (1858-1932) to develop a simplified Latin as a common language. Volapuk was invented around 1897 by Johan Martin Schleyer (1831-1912) (see Wells, 2005 [1905], p. 271, n. 11). In 1929 Charles K. Ogden introduced Basic English, an international auxiliary language with an 850-word vocabulary for people with no knowledge of English (see Petrilli, 1995).

Welby speaks of a 'common humanity,' but this does not mean to postulate and impose a 'common language,' such as Esperanto, or, in the past, Latin, sacrificing others. In a passage from her book of 1911, *Significs and Language*, Welby says she wants Esperanto, but naming it as an expressive resource alongside others including ancient Greek, literary language, and Zulu clicks (see Welby, 1911 [1985], p. 83). In any case, while acknowledging the need, indeed the inevitability of international languages, e.g. the telegraph code, she draws attention to the importance from a significal perspective of expressive wealth as determined by the great multiplicity of different historical natural languages as of all special languages, that is, by linguistic variation. Such wealth would be lost if variation and diversity were eliminated to create a situation characterized by what we identify as 'monologism' and 'monolingualism.' In Welby's view loss of languages coincides with loss in significance.

In the 'Final Note' to her book of 1897, *Grains of Sense*, Welby takes her stand in the debate of the time concerning the problem of war and peace. By contrast with those who placed their hopes for peace and mutual understanding in a common language, Welby shifted her attention to the conditions that make communication and mutual understanding possible. Beyond the concept of common language, this led her to problematize the structural presence of values, sense and significance in all languages, therefore, in our own terminology, the capacity for mutual listening and hospitality towards the other present in all languages. Beyond physical proximity Welby postulates what she calls 'mental communication' as a necessary condition for the construction of an international community, that is, the capacity to share and communicate values. Reflecting on problems of communication Welby identified in mutual indifference among peoples, cultures and languages a determining condition for the

internationalization of hatred, war and destruction, sacrifice of the other; and in mutual listening, hospitality towards the word of the other, the premise for cooperation among civilizations, triumph of justice and international order over anarchy and extermination. In this context of discourse, to speak of a 'common language' such as Esperanto in Welby's day meant, for some people, to indicate a possible solution to the type of misunderstanding that lead to war, and for others, instead, to favour tension among peoples who at last understood each other. Also, at the time, some people saw a deterrent to war in economic interdependency among countries, and in such phenomena as traveling abroad which were thought to favour transnational friendship. On her part, Welby evidenced the importance of sharing values and of developing critical consciousness, of the capacity for critical interpretation and creative responsibility towards the other. Such values indicated the way to a world consecrated to mutual understanding and involvement, ultimately to peaceful living based on the principle of mutual cooperation among peoples and nations, beyond the barriers of identity for a 'new era in human thought and action' (see Welby, 1897, pp. 136-142).

Translation is transformation, transfiguration, transferral, transvaluation, and the difficulties of translation may also be attributed to the singularity or uniqueness, the otherness or specificity of each language, of each culture with respect to any other. However, such difficulties can also be overcome on the basis of the concepts of 'common humanity' and of 'human universals' (we have already signaled the connection with Rossi-Landi's concept of 'common speech'). Translation involves interpretation without which translation is not possible. And when we translate we in fact not only transfer meaning but transform and transfigure sense, meaning and significance in the dialectical and dialogical relation between the logic of otherness and the logic of identity, as so clearly illustrated by Welby in her paper 'What is Translation?' (see Appendix).

In 'Translate—and Master,' 23 May 1907, Welby criticizes the tendency to resignation in the name of Divine Will, often no more than a cover and alibi for one's own ignorance and obtuseness. In the same way, she also criticizes the tendency to

accept untolerable contradictions. She considers poets responsible for exasperating such attitudes as when they consider nature as torturer and devourer of her own children creating mystifications around the concept of pain and suffering. Everything must be translated and mastered, including the experience of pain, in a way that is constructive and beneficial for all. Such logic highlights the close interconnection between translation, interpretation, knowledge, significance, critique and responsibility, a constant through all Welby's writings.

In 'To What End?' dated 8 June 1907, Welby identifies the sense of the human being's existence in translation towards ever more developed spheres of thought, to ever higher spheres of praxis and expression. Human beings are the ongoing result of translative processes from vegetable and animal life through to the emotional and intellectual. Welby even theorizes relations between human beings and machines in terms of translation. All the same, as much as translative processes have developed sense beyond the level of sensorial perception to high levels of meaning and signifying processes through to the sense of value, including the moral, Welby believed that mankind had not yet fully recognized the potential of sense developed to the levels of significance. And no doubt from an evolutionary perspective, human beings, the masters of nature, have transcended the lower levels of sense as represented by vegetable and animal life through translative processes. Paradoxically, however, though equipped with the capacity for projection and development, for transcendence with respect to the ordinary limits of experience, human beings have not yet reached the maximum levels of expressive, cognitive, or axiological potential.

In an untitled paper of 30 May 1908, Welby also discusses the 'analogical relation,' that is, the art of establishing correspondences among spheres of experience, even distant from each other, in terms of translation. Importance of the prefix 'trans-' in the word 'trans-lation' for an understanding of the nature of translation is the subject of an untitled paper of 14 August 1908. Welby emphasizes the nature of translation as a cognitive procedure through which are established relations of analogy and comparative transferral among ideas, problems and things belonging to different spheres of experience, among different

sign systems, thereby enhancing the interpretive, expressive and communicative power of language. Welby mostly supported her views by referring to progress in the sciences.

To theorize language from the perspective of significs, means to theorize language in relation to action as well as to values. Welby's significs prefigures speech act theory and conceptualization of language in terms of communicative games as formulated by English analytical philosophy from approximately the second half of the twentieth century onwards, but in terms that are far more reductive with respect to her own approach (see Petrilli, 2006c, ch. 8). As says Welby, 'language is only the supreme form of Expressive Action,' and the play or action of music is related to the play or action of life itself.

'Expression' and 'communication' call for 'articulate Translation of the dialects of experience' in their multiplicity, creating a verbal and nonverbal expressive apparatus that is ever more metaphorical and figurative. The method of association and combination through which experience is articulated and developed in all its diversity and complexity renders meaning ever more polyphonic and polylogic, to say it with Bakhin, and never 'plain and obvious,' as says Welby (see Petrilli, 2006c, ch. 4). At the same time, however, Welby theorizes the need to apply the principle of simplification—which can be related to Peirce's own 'principle of economy'—on both the conceptual and practical levels. Of course, in light of Welby's significs, simplicity is not to be understood reductively neither in terms of triviality nor in the sense of limiting signifying experience. The concluding passage to this paper is a good description of the close interrelationship between translation, interpretation, and significance as theorized from the perspective of significs.

Welby's considerations on the language of mathematics in a paper of 23 September 1908 entitled 'Mathematics' begin with a description of mathematics as ensuing from translative processes into the 'highest region of the rational brain,' while maintaining relations of dependency upon the biological or physiological order. On the basis of such interconnectedness Welby claims that the language of mathematics is not separate

from other languages, including ordinary language. Indeed, to remain efficient the language of mathematics must not isolate itself in its own specialism. Life in all its manifestations, including the human, develops in a continuum without interruptions through to intellectual life, and where barriers are introduced among different spheres of experience, thought, among different languages, bridges must be reconstructed and interconnections recovered in relations of reciprocal, we might add, 'dialogical' enhancement. The mathematician who closes to the 'commonwealth of interests' and confines himself to his own 'technically perfect method' loses sense in terms of humanity as well as of mathematics. The more the mathematical processes of abstraction, theorems, and technical symbols are perfected, the more mathematical language must be integrated by 'ordinary language.' Ordinary language is necessary to speak about mathematical discoveries and communicate them to others, as well as to interpolate mathematical discourse in the interpretation of relations between one problem and another, between one standpoint and another. Speaking of the work of the mathematician, Welby observes that 'His very abstractions, as they rise in complexity, delicacy and creative coherence, lose something that other thought activities can contribute; and among these the figurative or analogical, the image—as retinal infidelity, or the comparison—as condition of choice.' The language of mathematics inevitably makes use of ordinary language which must maintain its 'plastic vitality' in order to serve its different purposes, as in the case of the language of Augustus De Morgan and Bertrand Russell. Welby claims that through the significal method 'the thinker will pass easily from the one medium to the other, and thus contribute to the construction of bridges between mathematical and other forms of thought which will pass easily from the one medium to the other, and thus contribute to the construction of bridges between mathematical and other forms of thought which shall enormously enrich the human inheritance.' An example of this type of translation is the application of mathematics to mechanics. With the method of significs, says Welby, 'applied mathematics' responds to the specialism of the mathematician while at once involving competencies of the non specialist: 'For here, as everywhere, Significs means the intensification of that Sense of Significance which is at once the simplest and the most complex of our responses to the Arousers of Interest, the Calls

to which we are embodied potential Answers. What does all this imply? That the 'Pure Mathematician' is a greater man than he knows, but is only doing half his work,—the segregative isolative half.'

These papers by Welby echo and develop ideas that she had already expressed in various places of her writing, including her correspondence. For example, her critique of specialisms and separations, and quest to uncover interconnections already inscribed in different fields of thought and languages, thereby recovering relations of reciprocal enhancement (a position that prefigures today's quest for inter- and transdisciplinariness as theorized by Sebeok with his project for global semiotics), is anticipated in her exchanges with Victor V. Branford during the years 1902-1904:

> For the moment I am most interested in your idea of 'translating' the ideas of one group of studies into the nomenclature of another. This of course is one of the oldest problems of philosophy, but your way of approaching it is new. And there never, it seems to me, was so much need as today for special efforts to be made for bringing together on a common understanding groups of specialists who are in danger of becoming literally unintelligible to one another, not only in the details of their specialisms (as is doubtless inevitable), but also in the underlying principles. (Victor V. Branford to Welby, 1902-1904, in Cust, 1931, p. 70)

In 'Question of the Limits of Possible Translation,' 20 December 1908, Welby criticizes bad translations and warns against mistranslations which imply misconceptions and misinterpretations. Yet again she insists on the importance of a 'significal critique of language' and mastery over our expressive resources for an adequate development of 'articulate expression,' therefore of 'articulate communication' as a condition for progress and full development of human creativity in all its expressive potential. 'Articulate communication' is closely connected with 'expressive action,' including the nonverbal. Moreover, keeping account of progress in science, 'articulate communication is every day extending its range and its importance,' making mastery over our expressive resources ever more urgent. Without aiming at 'pedantic or priggish precision,' Welby underlines the importance

for our 'masters of style' of uniting aptness or consistency in our use of illustrative or suggestive terms to the search for beauty and expressive dignity as established by given conventions. In other words, sense, meaning and significance must not be sacrificed, not even in the case of literary writing, to the sounds and rhythms of language which transmit and induce emotions in turn translated into writing. Welby posits the correct use of language as a criterion and limit to possible translation also in the case of literary writing.

By 'translation' Welby broadly understands 'interpretation,' or better, as she says in an untitled paper of 14 December 1910, 'interpretations through translation.' Translations through the various realms of experience empower the signifying capacity in the quest for significance. In Welby's view this capacity is not yet fully developed due to negation of so-called 'primal sense,' or what in this paper she also calls 'native' sense—the original source of 'fecundating significance' (on primal sense or mother-sense, see Petrilli, 2006c, ch. 8). The method of significs consists in 'reading one form of experience—inductive and deductive and by the light of another,' thereby stimulating the central signifying function, the essential condition for humanity's centrifugal and transcending creativity.

With reference to the problem of subjectivity, such a perspective involves a shift from polarization in the usurper self, closed in upon its own identity, to the condition of opening of the I which is constructed in the relation to the other. If the end of any experience is 'fecundating significance' and therefore the coming to awareness of its value and signifying power, then the central question continues to be 'what does it signify?.' The concept of 'fecundating significance' is taken up again in the last untitled paper dated 11 November 1911 closing this collection dedicated to 'Significs and Translation.' In this paper, Welby continues her critique of oppositions of the type, inner world-outer world, inside-outside, upper-lower, to the advantage of a vision of the existent where distinctive units are not considered as separate and isolated, but as terms of a relation which respond to each other as interconnected parts of the same universal continuum.

7. Biographical and bibliographical note on Victoria Welby

Welby [later Welby-Gregory; née Stuart-Wortley], Victoria Alexandrina Maria Louisa, Lady Welby (1837–1912), philosopher, was born in England on 27 April 1837, the last of three children of Charles James Stuart-Wortley (1802–1844), and his wife, Lady Emmeline Charlotte Elizabeth Stuart-Wortley, née Manners (1806–1855), poet and traveller. James Archibald Stuart-Wortley (1776–1845) was her grandfather. She had little formal education aside from some private tuition, and from 1848 to 1855 she travelled widely with her mother in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Spain, Morocco, Turkey, Palestine, Syria and many other countries. In 1852 she published her travel diary. After her mother's death she lived with a succession of relatives before being taken in by her godmother, the duchess of Kent, mother of Queen Victoria. In 1861 she was appointed maid of honour to Queen Victoria; she spent almost two years at the royal court before her marriage at St George's Church, Hanover Square, London, on 4 July 1863, to William Earle Welby (1829–1898), military official, MP, and high sheriff, who with his father's death in 1875 became fourth baronet and assumed the additional surname Gregory. Consequently Victoria Welby's surname became Welby-Gregory. Alternatively to a series of pseudonyms or recourse to anonymity, she mainly published under her full name until the end of the 1880s, under the name of Hon. Lady Welby from 1890 to 1892, and as Victoria Welby from 1893 onwards, although she continued signing all official and business documents with her full name.

Welby's children were Victor Albert William (1864–1876), Charles Glynne Earle Welby (1865–1938), assistant under-secretary of state at the War Office and MP, and Emmeline Mary Elizabeth (Nina; 1867-1955), painter, sculptor, and writer, who wrote Welby's biography and edited her correspondence in two volumes, under her married name, Mrs H. Cust. During the first years of her marriage, Victoria Welby founded the Royal School of Art Needlework.

Not at all attracted to life at court, after her marriage Welby retreated to Denton Manor, Grantham, where she soon

began her research, with her husband's full support. Initially her interest was directed towards theological questions and in 1881 she published *Links and Clues*, which expressed her sympathy at that time with evangelical movements. It was unorthodox and unsuccessful and its poor reception caused her to reflect on the inadequacies of religious discourse, which was, she came to believe, cast in outmoded linguistic forms. She was drawn into an examination of language and meaning, and found a pervasive linguistic confusion which stemmed from a misconception of language as a system of fixed meanings, and which could be resolved only by the recognition that language must grow and change as human experience changes. She also made a serious study of science, believing that important scientific discoveries supplied the new experiences by which religious discourse could be transformed into something more meaningful.

Central to Welby's philosophy was her analysis of meaning into three components: sense—"the organic response to environment" (Hardwick, 1977, p. xxii); meaning—the specific sense which a word is intended to convey; and significance—which encompasses "the far-reaching consequence, implication, ultimate result or outcome of some event or experience" (*ibid.).* This triadic relationship relates closely to that established by Charles S. Peirce between immediate interpretant, dynamical interpretant, and final interpretant (*ibid.*, pp. 109-111). Peirce read her 1903 book *What is Meaning?* and reviewed it for The Nation alongside Bertrand Russell's *Principles of Mathematics*, to which he compared it in importance. A flourishing correspondence developed between Welby and Peirce, which was crucial to the development of his thought. She has been regarded as the "founding mother" of semiotics and her continuing importance is illustrated by the publication in the 1980s and 1990s of editions of her work and volumes of commentary on her thought. She contributed significantly to modern theories of signs, meaning, and interpretation, and introduced, in 1896, the neologism "significs" to denote the science of meaning. Significs examined the interrelationship between signs, sense—in all its signifying implications—and values.

Besides numerous articles in newspapers, magazines, and scientific journals (notably *The Spectator*, *The Exposi tor*, the

Fortnightly Review, the *Open Court*, *Nature*, *Mind, The Monist*, the *Hibbert Journal*, and the *Journal of Philosophy*, *Psychology and Scientific Methods*) Welby published a long list of privately printed essays, parables, aphorisms, and pamphlets on a large range of subjects in numerous spheres: science, mathematics, anthropology, philosophy, education, and social issues.

As her research progressed, Welby increasingly promoted the study of significs, channelling the great breadth and variety of her interests into a significal perspective. Shortly after the publication of two fundamental essays—"Meaning and metaphor" in 1893 and "Sense, meaning and interpretation" in 1896—the Welby prize for the best essay on significs was announced in the journal *Mind* in 1896 and awarded to Ferdinand Tönnies in 1898 for his essay "Philosophical terminology" (1899-1900). Important moments of official recognition for significs are represented by the publication of the entries "Translation" (Welby, 1902), "Significs" (co-authored with J.M. Baldwin and G.F. Stout, 1902), and "Sensal" (with G.F. Stout, 1902) in the *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology in Three Volumes* (1901–1905). However, the official recognition Welby had so tenaciously hoped for came only after approximately thirty years of "hard labour," with the publication of the entry "Significs" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1911. The signific movement in the Netherlands, which developed in two phases from 1917 to 1926 and from 1937 to 1956, originated from Welby's significs through the mediation of the Dutch psychiatrist, poet, and social reformer Frederik van Eeden (1860–1932).

From 1863 until her death in 1912 Welby was a friend and source of inspiration to leading personalities from the world of science and literature. She wrote regularly to over 450 correspondents from diverse countries including Great Britain, the United States of America, France, Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands. It was largely through such correspondence that she developed her theories. She began writing to politicians, representatives of the church, aristocrats, and intellectuals as early as 1870 and created an epistolary network which expanded rapidly from 1880 onwards, both locally and internationally. She used this network for her own enlightenment, as a sounding

board for her own ideas, and as a means of circulating her own ideas and those of others. Thanks also to her social position and court appointment as maid of honour to Queen Victoria, she counted friends and acquaintances among the aristocracy and government officials. Because of her interest in religious and theological questions she corresponded with leading churchmen of her day and subsequently with eminent scientists, philosophers, and educationists, whom she welcomed into her home where they met to discuss their ideas. Her correspondents included Michel Bréal, Bertrand Russell, C.K. Ogden, Herbert Spencer, Thomas Huxley Benjamin Jowett, F.H. Bradley, Henry Sidgwick, H.G. Wells, and William James. None the less, in spite of general awareness of the importance and originality of Welby's work, she did not for many years receive the recognition she hoped for, at least not publicly. In an attempt to avoid flattery, she either published anonymously or signed her work with pseudonyms, various combinations of initials, or simply as Victoria Welby. The only honour she valued was 'that of being treated by workers as a serious worker' (Hardwick, 1977, p. 13). Though she had no institutional affiliations, she was a member of the Aristotelian and Anthropological societies and was one of the original promoters of the Sociological Society between 1903 and 1904.

Welby was an open-minded female intellectual in the Victorian era despite—or, perhaps, thanks to—her complete lack of a formal education, which led her to search for the conditions which made her theoretical work possible. She highlighted the importance of her extensive travels as a child with her mother, which often took place in dramatic circumstances and ended with her mother's tragic death in the Syrian desert, leaving Victoria all alone until help came from Beirut. In a letter of 22 December 1903 to Peirce, who fully recognized her genius (as testified by their correspondence), Welby suggested that her unconventional childhood 'accounts in some degree for my seeing things in a somewhat independent way. But the absence of any systematic mental training must be allowed for of course in any estimate of work done. (…) I only allude to the unusual conditions of my childhood in order partly to account for my way of looking at and putting things: and my very point is that any value in it is impersonal. It suggests an ignored heritage, an unexplored mine.

This I have tried to indicate in *What is Meaning?*' (Hardwick, 1977, pp. 13-14).

Welby's scientific remains are now mainly deposited in two archives: the Welby Collection in the York University archives (Downsview, Ontario, Canada) and the Lady Welby Library in the University of London Library. The latter includes approximately 1000 volumes from Victoria Welby's personal library and twenty-five pamphlet boxes containing pamphlets, reprints and newspaper cuttings, religious tracts, sermons, and published lectures by various authors. Four boxes without numbers contain duplicates of most of Welby's own publications. The main part of her scientific and literary production is to be found at the York archives. Half of the collection consists of Welby's as yet mostly unpublished correspondence covering the years 1861-1912. A large part of the remainder comprises notes, extracts, and commentaries on a variety of subjects—biology, education, ethics, eugenics, imagery, language and significance, logic and significance, matter and motion, numbers theory, philosophy and significance, significs, and time. There are also speeches, lessons, sermons by other authors, numerous unpublished essays and a collection of poems by Welby, diagrams and photographs, translations, proofs, copies of some of her publications, and newspaper cuttings.

Suffering from partial aphasia and paralysis of the right hand owing to bad blood circulation caused by flu caught at the end of January 1912, Welby died on 29 March 1912 at Duneaves, Mount Park, Harrow, and was buried in Grantham, Lincolnshire, England.

University of Bari

Appendix: Victoria Welby's Unpublished Manuscripts, written between 1905-1911, on Significs and Translation[12]

13 March 1905
Significs and Translation

As in the evolutionary ascent our senses become more sharply differentiated, two things happen. 1) The universe tends to 'fall to pieces' (and it is a fall) and 2) the difficulty of concentration by mutual reinforcement and translation becomes greater. It is as though a commander were defeated because on occasion he could not turn his infantry into cavalry or either into artillery (or vice versa) and thus was actually encumbered instead of aided by the distinctions in function of his forces. Now in the original sense-state wherein in a sense the living 'cell' felt-touched-smelt-heard-saw and besides that responded to the real in nameless ways, this intertranslation was, on a very low level, possible. Hence survival; hence the preservation of the amazing 'can be' or may be, which science calls the potential, the very power to differentiate, to elaborate, to develop ever—brainwards. Life insists upon Mind, and that as ever-growing and ever greater in analytical, discriminative, constructive powers. But there is a price to pay. How bridge the 'gulfs' or surmount the barriers thus created? In nature, as we are incessantly reminded by science, there are none, and no rigid lines of demarcation. They are put there by imperious 'mind' for its own convenience. It has to work in sections, just as number has to be made up of units.

What nonsense we talk about not having advanced in intellect since the days of the Greek triumphs! In the first place, the date of that outflowering is in the history of man but yesterday. In the second, we have been recoiling since, in order to spring further. We have been sharpening our tools and reshaping our instruments and reconstructing our machinery. That is the significance of the 'mechanical' age. The literal machinery like the

12 Welby Collection, Box 31, File 49, York University Archives, Toronto. All papers in the file are presented here except for two, one entitled "Mathematics", dated 23 September 1908, the other, dated 11 November 1911, is untitled and closes the collection.

means of literal locomotion is a projection of mental tendency. And we have been re-learning to detect: training ourselves to discover and observe the smallest trace or hint of 'actual fact'; and (yet more important), to criticise relentlessly our own observation. Now we have a fresh lesson to learn, that of a significance itself: no longer as vague and simple (for the very idea is still in the embryonic stage) but as full of pregnant distinction, like for instance that between Image, Sign, and Symbol or that between Sense, Signification, and Meaning. But to do this we must learn to translate inter-sensally and inter-functionally. As we learn to translate sight into hearing, and feeling into both, so we must learn to translate emotion into intellect and both into will and conversely. Thus shall we learn how to translate mathematics and physics into poetry, religion, ethics; thus shall we learn how to translate philosophy into science, and all this again both backwards and forwards.

And consequently and finally, we must acquire terms which shall include such diversities, and signalise the change of orientation which has come and is coming about. Thus we shall begin to see that there is no question of giving up reason for will and desire, or of giving up emotion and imagination for the critical and dialectical intellect: no question of realism v. idealism, or of physics v. metaphysics.

Even the morbid may in that day have its significance; and even in some forms when better understood, be found to supplement and enrich the witness of the normal. What we call brain disturbance or disease or defect or abnormal development involving loss of balance and loss of hold on the precious consensus of average commonplace common-sense, may in some cases be the preliminary disturbance and the first indications—culminating it may well be in an agony of birth-pang—of some great generative advance in human reaction to those illimitable excitations of the real universe of which directly we perceive so little, but of which science is perpetually and insistently preaching to us.

There is a tremendous Schooling in front of us! Are we ready to allow a really 'transcendent' training to educate us, to educe powers as yet latent, and not even expressible in an antiquated

terminology, which by reaction on our ideas is compelling us to remain in one of the very stages which otherwise we should be outgrowing.

9 December 1906
What is Translation?

When we cross the channel, we find that we no longer ask for bread, but for pain (which in its spelling arouses an unfortunate association!); no longer for meat but for viande; no longer for vegetables but for legumes.

If however we had always assumed that there could be but one right form of speech, that all others were but gibberish: or again, if outgrowing this we assumed a final difference, an insurmountable barrier between various languages,—so that it was impossible to say in one what it was a matter of course to say, even admirably, in another—we should, as travellers in the actual bodily sense be almost exactly in the position which, as thinkers and workers, is actually ours.

Now of course in a given family of languages there are plenty of words (as of idioms) which vary but slightly, so that we can at once detect their common sense. But outside the language family or class, we have no such help.

What then are we to do? We must contrive to render the one language into the other: we must discover, anyhow for practical purposes, how to state any given fact, ask for any given object, describe any given need, process, appearance, in terms perhaps totally different from those which are 'native' to us. And we call this Translation.

What then is Translation—this wonderful power of making an identical statement or description in different terms, thus securing benefits of the first order of importance and enlarging our powers of dealing with the world by acquiring the power of common understanding? We naturally, of course, think of it as a secondary matter, even a mere question of convenience of intercourse. We naturally assume that there is yet a better way; and

to save trouble would give a Utopian world a common language. Well, of course up to a certain point this is an obvious need and boon, as we see e.g. in the case of the international telegraph code; and it is absurd that we should ever have submitted to be without what is so easily provided; a provision which we once saw in Latin and now see in Esperanto.

But even this only applies to a certain family or group of languages. There seems no possibility of a world-wide Latin or Esperanto, providing for all needs; unless indeed there is an unobserved eliminating process going on which will eventually kill all but one family of speech. In any case, this would mean one of the greatest losses possible to Man. We are waking up to this fact in the discovery of the rapid loss of local dialect and accent, and of native languages like Gaelic and Erse, &c. It means a loss of enriching Variation: it means reduction to dead uniformity. We are even attempting an artificial preservation of some of the vanishing languages and dialects. But do we realise the true and ultimate nature of the loss as one of a mine of significance? Do we remind ourselves insistently enough of the need we feel of quoting; of saying something in another language or in a different occupational dialect, which cannot be so well said in our own? This is an intimate psychological need. We excuse ourselves for much quoting from other—mainly classical—languages (a temptation from which most of us, from ignorance, are free) because we cannot translate. Now the words best worth quoting are the most human, and therefore of most universal interest. Why therefore cannot we translate them? Because of the deep psychological, arising from physiological, differences which have generated variations in modes of expression, and which make for a needed wealth of distinction.

Yet there is a way of overcoming such difficulties. Beneath all other differences there is a common humanity—a truism little in practice recognised. The question. 'If you tickle us, do we not laugh?' applies all over the world. There is an enormous stock of universally human riches not yet drawn upon. They are overlain with a thick crust of convention. We have hardly begun to translate, because we have hardly begun to interpret.

Once more, then, What is Translation? The first thing to understand clearly and emphatically is that the important point lies here—as so often—in the prefix; the 'Trans-.' Whether we translate, transfer, transmit, transform, transmute, transfuse, and so on, we are always concerned, as common life and the dictionary tells us, with an across, athwart, over, beyond, on the other side of, through.

Among the abundant linguistic forms which automatically reveal the central place of change-bringing movement in our experience, transformation comes nearest to translation. The latter, indeed, is originally, like its congeners, a question of space and of removal. The thing moved remains the same. But transformation changes form as transfiguration changes figure; and these, while preserving identity, is what we need.

This then is our demand: a practical and scientific translation which implies a true transformation and often transfiguration, and yet carries over all the value of the translated dialect of mind. But this, we see, is more than translation; which indeed is a mere transference of meaning, of what it is intended to convey, from one set of symbolic sounds or their written equivalents, to another.

We ought to speak of transforming French into English, and still more of transforming a 'dead' language into a 'living' one. And the process may be (1) Literal, (2) Liberal (or general), (3) Significal. The last is our pressing need.

We must translate not merely speech but its raison d'être, its sense, its meaning, its significance.

23 May 1907
Translate—and Master

How often we dignify our own ignorance and dulness with the name of the Divine Will and are, alas resigned to it! How often we permit contradictions in conception which ought not to be tolerated for a moment: The poets, instead of helping us here, hinder us. They take up for instance the ludicrous inconsistency

of calling Nature the Mother—which 'she' is—and making her the typical Waster, Torturer, Devourer of her children, evolving 'heart-strings' only to wring them, nerves only to intensify suffering, mind only to add a fiendish sting by reflection, memory, anticipation: by its before and after, its bitter recollections, bitter forebodings—bitter resentment and rebellion.

Sufferings? Nature says, Suffer me—to teach and lead you by Endurance and by rising through the very burden—bearing of motherhood which you would outgrow: the bearing of new life. Conceive and bear!

But more. Nature says, If I did not intensify suffering you would be even more contented than you are with the thick stifling darkness of ignorance which denounces the loyal learner and calls his passion that of a prying curiosity…

The office of Pain is to cry, Learn, learn! Of the children, of a natural order, of all clear and holy, pure and innocent, keen, penetrative, victorious thought. You are not to bear, not to suffer in its present untranslated sense. The ascetics and the martyrs have at least discovered this paradox, though they have done it wastefully: they have discovered that pain may be strangled by a fierce frontal attack or captured and enslaved by an ambuscade. And then they have found it silently smiling upon them and turning into a mountain path-way, while the broad road of flat ease and pleasure was always suggesting the nausea of satiety and the dying down of the precious conquered Good; ours through strenuousness which rises through the zone of 'pleasure and pain' to a greater stimulus than either, to that which shows both to us very far away, in the dim gone by and done with…

Translate—and master.

O wretched race that we are, ever turning from the Gate of Life and falling short of the Why of things, because our reaching out is so half-hearted and so faithless, and we know not what we say! Well, it is a great thing that we can so reproach ourselves, as some of our race have seen. For the pride of race must awake: we belong to the stars and sun: shame on our pretty gropings, our

unworthy ideals—and reals. The idealist is a byword, and he gives back scorn to the realist. In truth man appeals to Halfness and to Halfness he shall go. But wholeness, like Nature his Mother, is waiting—to make him Whole.

[Undated typescript]
The Snares of Translation

(A) I suppose 'verdict' in this French sentence, 'qui formule le décret ou promulgue le verdict' is one of many words borrowed back from English usage.

(B) O, but verdict is as much French as English. It is the decision of the Judge.

(A) But in England it is given by Jury, not Judge: and the Jury is not French.

(C) But 'verdict' is simply 'true saying,' and verdict is Latin, which has come to use through Norman French.

(B) Yes: there is no question of technical meaning or borrowing; verdict is a word in general use.

(A) But only in general use metaphorically and among cultivated people.

(B) Not at all: I dispute that; there is no question of metaphor in the matter.

(A) Unless you are speaking from knowledge obtained by enquiry, you may find that a risky question to beg. Jury also is in use on the same borrowed and metaphorical footing. You speak, (a shade more jokingly than of 'verdict,' of the 'jury' of friends you have assembled to decide on a new wall-paper. 'Sentence' again, like 'conveyance' is on a much broader ground. But one has to hazard even this much. No assertion is safe on this subject, for it is almost entirely unexplored, and Dr. Murray's is practically the only Dictionary which has attempted to actualise some and deliteralise other current expressions. No one supposes of course that we could ever have an exhaustive, still less a lasting classification; in the very act of making it, we should find Language shifting, yielding, growing, withering, under our feet.

Yet we should at least learn to fear reckless rushing in, and at all events to tread gently where we have hitherto been quite sure that 'of course we knew and everybody knows' where

the limits and what the work and effects of metaphor and the figurative really are. We should be a little less disastrously prompt with our 'of course's' and our repudiation of any possible confusion in the use of the very 'multiplex' terms which form our colloquial and literary currency. And this is already the case with all our deepest scholars and most penetrating thinkers in the younger generation.

8 June 1907
To What End?

What are we here for? To what end is Man born?

To translate upwards, in faithful obedience to the law that brought man into being—helpless, bare, defenceless, yet victorious—the Survival of the Fittest in an ever-rising sense of phrase. 'When I am weak then I am strong.' What else as a man can I be?

Man is the Master Paradox; let him see that he realises this. There are wanton paradoxes; and by all these the Human Being 'himself' is the greatest he knows, little as he yet know even true himself, much less its possessor. He is here as having translated Vegetative and brutal strength into emotional and intellectual strength. He is stripped of the lower to be robed in the higher: he has surmounted the lesser sense-world and entered the larger, the moral, sense-world. Like the mother-animal which foreshadows, predicts him, he gives up the meaner to enter the noble life: he learns what worth really is and thus what is and what may be for him both attainable and worthy.

But first we must realise as we have not yet done—clearly, vividly, delicately, practically, unmistakeably—the wealth of sense in which a phrase or a word is true and connotes the real. Sometimes, often indeed, this wealth of Sense makes for a dangerous poverty. Our hearer has too much choice, when he and the speaker both think he has none. In many cases we must have if not a new symbol, some distinguishing sign on the old symbol, to show in which of many senses we are using it.

But first let us realise not only the various 'senses' in which the word or phrase may be used, but also the absence of any hard and fast line of demarcation between those senses. We must be educated to realise here the borderlands instead of dangerously ignoring them. And this perhaps notably in the moral world, which is the world of motives and moment, the realm of the Sovereign Dynamic.

It is our motives and not merely our words or our actions that ultimately signify. Symptoms have to be interpreted, 'disease' has to be traced into the hidden evils that produce them. How obvious, how commonplace it sounds! And yet we are a long way from that in the moral judgements which we teach our children—who instinctively know better—to form.

Now actions, like words are indeed for practical purpose the immediate criterion. But when a man approaches us with a knife we have to decide swiftly whether he means, that is intends, to kill us or release or heal us. His action is ambiguous, because it may have many or at least alternative senses. So with an animal, let us say our dog, which appears to attack but is playing with or even trying to save us.

Motive is the one moral thing, and in the end the strongest of all things; and the meaning of this ascends from the mechanical to man or again descends in a wonderful sweep of translative achievement, from man to machinery. Furthermore in man it is not only volitional but moral: and the Best becomes the strongest to survive: the cosmical Will is done. When we are weak in one, the lesser and lower sense, then are we strong in another, the greater and higher sense.

25 November 1907
Translation 'Upwards'

In us organic activities have been, —as our 'brains' grew—more and more 'translated' into mental ones. Those great organic muscles, our physiological hearts, continue to pump: but our emotional 'hearts' have learnt in organic translation to beat with

enthusiasm and to thrill with sympathy. Our fathers indeed aptly spoke of our 'bowels' of compassion.

Our 'feet' have learnt to walk in true ways, or again they may make false steps and we stumble, stagger, or fall on the paths of moral life. Our fate may be in our own 'hands,' or the hands of others, and we handle, practically or theoretically, the problems of life.

But it is needless to labour this statement of natural process in translation of the organic into the mental. Let us only—translatively—open our 'eyes' and 'ears' to the true significance and application of this automatic racial translation of the organic into the mental world—and then let us see that we do it loyally and in order, not casually and chaotically or in no longer relevant forms, as, alas, in linguistic 'translation'—in imagery—we are now doing.

30 May 1908
Translation

If the real art of poetic (or prosaic) translation from one idiom or speech into another is still to seek, much more to seek is, not merely the art but the fully developed function of analogical translation, the expression of corresponding character in widely differing forms and regions of experience. The mastery of this, one of the greatest of the human gifts, is comparable indeed only to reason itself, which is often dependent on its secret and unrecognised working for good and evil. We instinctively or deliberately assume some correspondence or at least likeness between two facts or events or sequences. We even use the terms of the one to express or convey 'figuratively' or 'metaphorically' the idea of the other.

Passing from the known to the unknown, the condition of all knowledge and all advance, we make comparison, whether we will or no, the very key of mental life; the spring of all invention and all application of discovery. But this carries two dangers. We may suppose a rigid, mechanical, technical correspondence where there is something much higher because more plastic and

productive,—a Significant one. Or again we may suppose all analogy, all metaphor, all images, to be merely the accident or ornament of popular exposition, solely of passing and pictorial utility or rhetorical adornment. Meanwhile it is impressive; it arrests attention, it appeals to population notions and habits, or again being decorative it makes for persuasive attraction: all this is at once its advantage and its drawback, its service and its danger.

Realising this, one would suppose that every civilised child would be brought up to look upon a comparison, an apparent likeness, similarity, correspondence, as one of the most important things in the world, far more important than spelling or grammar; as important as emphasis. We should all be pointing out that a true analogy was that of using one thing to define or describe another, in order to throw light upon it and gain help or warning from it; that it is a question of opening a shutter or bringing a lamp; it illuminates and illustrates; it clears up, it shows us the way. This very image of 'light' is a case in point. But in fact we are brought up or left with the idea that analogy or image was a casual factor in speech; better, if not left alone, at least treated as merely incidental and if pressed or carried out, dangerous.

11 June 1908
A Badly Needed Translation

Life as vegetal has the power of transfiguring the mineral and gaseous world into the living. As animal, it has lost his power, and become parasitic on plant or animal life. 'Mind' in its turn has lost the power of direct assimilation from nature, and as language witness is compelled, in order to function, to live upon animal experience. That is, mind can do nothing unless it 'feeds' upon organic experience, besides being found in some connection or correlation with what we call a 'brain.' What is That, in its turn, which is in the same relation to mind—that is, which represents the next step in ascent, dependent on the last? At present we have but obscure hints and suggestions of this.

Sometimes we call it spirit. Probably we are more right than we know. Life depends in a special sense upon the air, breath: mind depends upon Life: is not the next higher stage

dependent on Mind? And is not the refinement of atmosphere to be translated upwards stage after stage, until the enormous temperatures and all the incalculable energies which mind indirectly detects through instruments which it invents and through its power to 'reason' upon the messages of these, are found to be the natural environment of the next higher step of the creative ascent? Suppose that in every stage power in a lower form is lost as a condition of higher acquirement?

The loss of the living in being unable to assimilate the inorganic is compensated by the general gain of the animal over the plant; so with the mind thus gained. The 'spirit,' which ought to be evident and transparent to all, since it is the Air which the mind breathes, the pure atmosphere which pervades and vitalises it, has taken the form of gases which act morbidly, though with indirect (anaesthetic) benefit. Hence myth, superstition, mysticism, and all which obscurely stirs us, evoking schemes of doctrine and speculation, ecstasies and terrors of the 'supernatural,' heavens and hells.

We construct elaborate narratives and arguments, all clashing one with the other: we have gods Many or One: we dimly see here the Triadic order which unconsciously for the most part governs our thought; and speak, in the most 'advanced' of religions, of the Trinity, —always tending for reasons but little understood, to begin and end with a Triad. All this belongs to the Order, in its lowest form, of intoxication, in its higher form of exaltation like that produced by nitrous oxide or in the form of ecstasy produced by asceticism, by long fasting and by silent and solitary contemplation. Great things, to us 'miraculous' things, are thus brought about. But we do not understand them or even our own Holiness, Wholeness. We are but barely on the threshold of the life in which they become natural and normal as the highest link between us all, belonging to the categories of that experience which science can deal with. To the Christ they are entirely natural; and to live in the Christhood which man is here to rise into and share, is the illumination of this as yet obscure ascent of Life and its 'blossom' and 'fruit.'

14 August 1908 [untitled]

From all directions in which one's mind and thought may radiate, the importance of the idea prompting the verbal prefix 'trans-' becomes more manifest, more clearly accentuated. Change of position and thus of view: realisation of unity in multiplicity: change of kind, of aspect, and of worth, as well as of number: distinction, that is, of quality involved not merely in difference of (relative) quantity but by position as well as by measure and number: these and more are indicated by the prefix 'trans-.'

But here the chemist must help us instead of looking scornfully amused at our muddles of meaning, and practically saying, 'the less said the better' (which as yet is too painfully true in unnoticed directions). He is really the best preacher of the 'Trans-.' And all his 'transes-' themselves need to be strictly and severely applied to the so-called 'chemistry' of mind. They turn over, into, out of. They begin with spatial transit and transfer.

Are we then to acquire new and infinitely cumbrous Dictionary of symbol and notation, as the chemist is obliged to do? Are we to imitate his enforced elaboration of technical formula, his enormous complexity of accumulative and distinctive symbol? No. For we have an unused or at least seldom used short-brain and short-thought and short-sense, compared to which even the chemist's is 'circumlocutory.' The long way round, the labyrinthine path, the laborious collection of item, the minute analysis (still, even so, comparatively coarse, as abounding problems yet unsolved bear witness), only make more conspicuous the painful scarcity of the interpretation which has given Man his still infantile degree of domination of those conditions given him by Nature to master and to utilise by penetrative and practical simplification. (Here we need a word like gist, an admirable one).

Truth forbid that we should undervalue that power of mind which rivals its own products, the instruments ending in 'scope.' But not only are there many more 'scopes' to be mechanically constructed—as also many more tests to be applied and combinations to be effected—but it becomes more and more imperative that power to read one problem by the help of another;

to make one solution give birth to another, to apply elsewhere and otherwise some unexpected and fruitful result, should be enhanced by the normal development of that articulate system of sound and mark which so powerfully though unconsciously sways all our thinking and our doing. For language is only the supreme form of Expressive Action. And the play of this must in all its forms be at the very least as discriminative and as exquisitely true as the 'play' of the typical musician and even the 'play' of evolving vitality itself, or the 'play' of all natural forces.

Now the possible Play of Speech spoken or written or otherwise conveyed, though far from being as yet attained or even in the right sense aimed at, surpasses all other. Thereby mind and thought, to borrow a phrase from the primitive chemist, precipitates a deposit of incalculable value.

Nature here, as usual, puts us to shame. The cloud, for instance, does full justice to Water, Air, Light and the 'laws of gravitation.' And it may do justice also to another call, the call of sense of beauty in us and of the unsounded significance of that 'nature' which we so vaguely and inconsistently realise and express that we look upon it as in turn a cruel monster to be defeated, a healthy and virtuous norm, a purely mechanical system or order, and as the Divine Nature,—an unconscious rebuke to the 'super-natural'; for what can be super-divine?

Every flower and blade of grass, as each rock or pebble, does full justice to its theme and to its setting. So, in health, does our pulse, our contracting muscle, our nerve-thrill. Only in the Expression and Communication of this and all else of which we are conscious or call fact and truth; only in the articulate Translation of the dialects of experience, are we content needlessly and shamefully to fail. No fear but that at best there will be failure enough! But in Expressive Communication we have largely a gratuitous failure and the most disastrous one we can make. For life itself, like Nature and Mind, may be called—that is may be considered as—Expression: and we must grow to understand more worthily that of which it speaks to us and would faithfully reveal. In a deep sense indeed, we do in fact understand or rather under-move; we move and stand under a heaven of reality mirrored in

the humblest drop or disk of polished metal in our hand or at our feet. Why do we aspire? How do we come to use the term aspiration? Because we are bound, as human, to be erect and to look upwards: and because we belong like our world to a sun; to a Solar centre. We may well speak of a sun of righteousness and of the light of the world. But we move in a double revolution, —the loyal and the trusty order of our orbit. In this connection, then, let us note, as an example, the inexcusable folly of using the idea of revolution, the very condition of our planetary Home's appointed Way, of its benefit from its Sun, to designate 'revolt,' tending to destructive anarchy, mutiny or desertion. Here we see an instance of the work of mis-translation against which no protest is effectually raised; of a false type of analogy and comparative transference of an idea from one sphere of interest to another. We cannot of course do without this: there is a mass of examples to show that the man who protests that we can and must avoid the pitfalls of imagery and metaphor by abstaining from their use, is often the most flagrant offender. And he who does not only commit what he denounces; he does it in subtly falsifying ways, constantly overlooked or ignored.

Significs will effectually test the relative of any and all forms of transference or transposition, of any process indeed which can be symbolised by the prefix 'trans'-. Even in this case—one of uncounted thousands—we should gain by the simplifying, illuminating, results of applying consistently the method of Significs. This tries all things by the test of Sense. In what or which sense, on what ground, with what object, from what startpoint, with what reference are you working, thinking, speaking? What do you intend to convey, to induce, to effect, to suggest, to imply by your act, your attitude, your procedure or abstention or refusal; by speaking or declining to speak? And what is the essential significance of any of these activities and all others worthy the name? To what do they point, at what do they hint, what may they reveal?

20 December 1908
Question of the Limits of Possible Translation

Is it desirable to allow such terms as truth, honesty, virtue, holiness, love, good, to connote, by gradual vitiation through laxity, moral

or intellectual or both, forms of vice, adulteration or falsification? Is it not better when quite feasible—in fact when the natural and easy plan—to preserve a given line of association in expression, so that the man of the new generation may never find e.g. dirty or mean becoming the serious epithets for what he is normally to approve and admire; and such terms as noble and pure for what he is to despise, ridicule, even detest?

There are prevalent and tolerated mis-translations of this kind and scarce less monstrous, against which we cannot too strenuously protest. Better none than those. Indeed the present state of things, once perceived, is so intolerable and leads to such desperate tragedy of misconception and abortion of mental life, that there are times when one would almost welcome a general dumbness and agraphia so that we were reduced to gesture and attitude and to the resources of geometrical and numerical diagram and symbol.

There at least we seem still to be sanely consistent; we don't call a triangle a square, or muddle up 2 with a 4, a 3 with a 5, although these lasts are tempting alike! The question here arises, how far expressive action has correspondingly deteriorated? As this is still largely natural and not conventional, we may think it invulnerable. But we pay a heavy price for refinements of civilisation which on the whole tend upwards and give us priceless brain-born privileges. And here also the question arises: How to keep on a rising line in character as well as in ability, without risking the loss of attunement with the order, the law, the tone, the pitch, the harmony, the ac-cord and con-cord, the true scales and spectrums, of the universe: how in short to avoid the analogue of squint, blunder, chaos,—failure.

The intellectual and moral ascent ought to really be ascent: but there is no subtle corruption than that which can be conveyed through a language allowed to rot, or to harbour parasites malignant only as out of really significant relation. If the corrupting process were a question of vulgarism or ignorance; if the priceless quality of significance did not, among those from whom we must naturally look for the typical examples of ideal and conscience in this matter, suffer so strangely from the

prevalent supineness and neglect, the protest of Significs would not be needed. But at present the evil is allowed to grow without check or even notice till many of the highest and purest forms of expression are killed out or degraded by unworthy contexts.

We are prompt to denounce vice in action and even ignore and even encourage. Indeed many a criminal may have begun by taking language 'at its word'—at its face value—and seeing no 'harm' in deeds which reflect the words used in quite respectable circles! Many instances of such perversion are given elsewhere, and terms like 'property' and 'marriage' to say nothing of 'murder' and 'falsehood' are used in morally indefensible ways, though legal exigencies may up to a certain point excuse and even justify them in merely formal procedure.

Our 'masters of style' are indeed concerned with certain conventional canons of beauty and dignity, some of course in essential harmony with what is here submitted. But that harmony is mostly negatived or neutralised by needless sacrifice of aptness or consistency in illustrative or suggestive terms. Especially in verse—blank or rhymed—is this the case. We impose barriers on Sense or Meaning for the sake of sound and its rhythms as conveying or inducing emotion, translating this into written form. But it is possible for the sake of the luxury of emotion or even for that of mere pleasure, to taint the very sources of the highest human developments.

Our idealistic terms are not always so true to Nature and the real as in the case of the Heavenly, the 'heaved,' the Uplifted mind or thought, that which instinctively acknowledges its kinship—with its planet's and its sun's—to the starry motherhood of the cosmos into which, as 'sky,' with infant eyes we look…

Abundant evidence of the crying need of a Significal Critique of language as we are content to teach it to each fresh generation, can be supplied. Meanwhile attention may be drawn to what appears at least broadly to be the fact; that our modern Western civilisation is the first and only instance on record of a helplessly falsified expression for accordingly adequate and creative activities.

It is as though we are content to hobble in the shoes which fitted our infancy or to use arms and hands artificially distorted and partly paralysed.

Never did the advanced sections of the race more urgently need a normally organic language: never had we the conditions or more complete command over our expressive resources: articulate communication is every day extending its range and its importance, while modern science brings to the front the crying need of flawless accuracy and consistency, though as in the delicate 'tuning' of an instrument this ought to be the very opposite of a pedantic or priggish precision. So also does the enormous and ever-growing advance in invention of which the incipient 'conquest of the air' is a conspicuous instance.

No flaw, even the smallest, can be tolerated there. And yet invention can never be as speech is, at the very heart of all that is worthy to be called human life. Physical communication it but a mockery while mental communion remains in its present state. In invention we tolerate no flaws of any kind, since we realise the disaster which they must bring. But how often is mental and social disaster the consequence of unrealised or neglected flaws at the very heart of Expression!

14 December 1910 [untitled]

We must train ourselves to give examples (of course as yet crude and tentative only) of the Translations (interpretations through translation) which lie waiting for us throughout experience, when we have learnt to signify, and to apply that process normally. As yet we do not fully signify. We have not reached the true norm of significance. Hence our groping in jungles of mind, and collecting well-sifted bundles of bone and skin, and muscle and nerve &c. &c. out of which to construct marvellous dolls that speak and jibber. Hence our solemn reminders to each other that this or that achievement, however 'ideal' and practically desirable, is impossible for man and therefore an utopian dream. That is true: for unless we are all brought up to signify and interpret as we are born and here to do, we have to blow off useless 'steam' in visionary and mystical dreams and beliefs. A wretched man

even drinks to get the caricature by poison of a natural glory. For as it is, we are all gratuitously sub-natural. So we wander in a cultivated labyrinth in which we diligently labour to find clues: and when we have found these we use up the rest of our 'time' (our span and thread) in endless spinning of theory and equally endless tearing of the web in controversy that inevitably and unconsciously nullifies instead of enriching.

We think we mentally walk: but the left foot refutes the right, which returns the compliment. And so, oddly enough, we are 'no forrader,' though we can talk eloquently about the 'advance' to which our muscular fatigue, though possibly caused by a treadmill, is witness, and enlarge on the folly of supposing that there is a 'royal road' to the solution of problems all the while there to be solved as we solve the problem of breathing.

There is indeed a 'royal road,' penetrating all our jungles like that made by a flash of lightning or a wireless message. But as we are, only the rare genius ever strikes it all. He has no time to show us what it indicates and whither it leads; or else he finds us putting him on pedestals or shrines, literalising his lessons, missing his points and issuing 'editions de luxe' of him; we have sometimes even tried to sterilise by our glosses his spring of fecundating significance. Why? Because our Native and Primal Sense has been trained out, snubbed out of us. So he may well be glad to go!

Here then is a ludicrously inept Example of what must become a sound and fruitful method of reading one form of experience—inductive and deductive and by the light of another. We will take, at hazard, a page out of Nature of Feb. 4th. 1909, p. 401, and make an elementary experiment as the children do, in application.

There is a source of mental radiation which may well be called 'Radium,' since it represents the greatest discovered intensity of radio-active forces, one which energises and exploits the mental world. Mind as radio-active (which is a 'planetary' offshoot of a 'solar,' a central energy) emits light itself and is 'phosphorescent.' It changes the colour of precious stones of

thought and 'chemically' turns the oxygen of experience into ozone. The 'Water' of life is converted into steam or 'spirit' (the 'peroxide of hydrogen'), and is again formed by recombining its constituents. This and similar transformations are effected by 'a' and 'b' rays of thought.

But the human Radium gives off an emanation (a gas or spirit) which produces heat (the first necessity of mental life). While the 'life' of this emanation (which we have yet to identify) is very short, that of human Radium may be typified at present as about 1750 years long as against less than 4 days. This indicates the proportion of significal to ordinary 'thought' in value and power. It probably indicates a transformation of elements which in pre-radiatic days would not only have seemed but have been fantastic. We speak of mental 'depression' which makes one's despondent fears as heavy as lead. And as we are, this is an effect of human radium. That which supremely radiates irresistible power also supplies weight. And we need weighty thought and decision; as against dull or inert stupidity.

Meantime, while there is a weedy crop of fascinating theories tending to choke the precious sprout of a nourishing and developing human growth, all that we can do as yet is to stimulate the central signifying function which is the essential condition of man's recognition and attained command of the full use of his radio-active mind. At present he radiates but feebly or casually, and if at all, mainly from an usurpative 'Self'; but the latent force is there. We damp it down in childhood, substituting the partial paralysis of the present adult standard and average. We have to cherish every glint and germ of our Radio-active Humanity.

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ABSTRACT: Translation, Interpretation, and Common Meaning: Victoria Welby's Significal Perspective — As she worked through the nineteenth century Victoria Welby elaborated a fascinating theory of translation based on her theory of sign and meaning, which she designated with the term significs. This means to say that, on the one hand, Welby's theory of translation took account of the vastness and variety of the world of signs, therefore of the unbounded nature of translative-interpretive processes which cannot be limited to the mere transition from one language to another. The condition for interlingual translation in the human world is the larger context where translative processes converge with life processes and maybe push beyond in what would seem to be an unbounded cosmic dimension. On the other hand, that Welby should have related her translation theory to her theory of sign and meaning also implies that she founded her translation theory in a theory of value recognizing the inevitable importance of the latter when translating within a single language as much as across different languages in a plurilingual

and intercultural world. Ultimately, in the properly human world, to translate means to interpret, that is, to translate transfiguring and transvaluating significance.

RÉSUMÉ : Traduction, interprétation et signifié commun : la signifique chez Victoria Welby — Au XIX^{e} siècle, Victoria Welby élabore une remarquable théorie de la traduction et propose pour cette nouvelle conception du signe et du sens le terme signifique. D'une part, cette théorie de la traduction explore le vaste monde du signe de même que la nature insondable des processus de traduction et d'interprétation qui, bien évidemment, ne peuvent se résumer à une simple transposition d'une langue à une autre. En effet, la traduction interlangue s'inscrit dans un contexte où les circonstances actuelles font en sorte que le cours de la vie et les processus de traductions convergent, nous propulsant au-delà de ce qui pourrait sembler être une dimension cosmique sans frontière. D'autre part, en établissant un rapport entre sa théorie de la traduction et sa théorie du signe et du sens, Welby laisse entendre que sa théorie de la traduction est aussi créée à partir d'une théorie des valeurs, reconnaissant l'importance de cette dernière en traduisant, au sein d'un univers plurilingue et interculturel, autant dans une même langue que dans des langues différentes. Dans un monde qui est propre à l'être humain, traduire, c'est interpréter, c'est-à-dire transfigurer et transvaluer la signifiance.

Keywords: significs, significance, value, interpretation, critical methodology.

Mots-clés : signifique, signifiance, valeur, interprétation, méthodologie critique.

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